



Al-Ahram Weekly



Peace remains elusive

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak detailed yesterday's problems between the Palestinians and Israelis, saying the two sides are the only ones capable of solving them, reports Neville Khalil.

Addressing National Democratic Party parliamentarians for over two hours, Mubarak outlined three stumbling blocks in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on Israeli redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron. The first, Mubarak said, was the Israeli proposal of granting Israeli police the right of "hot pursuit" into Palestinian territories in emergencies or time of danger. "This would annul the Palestinian Authority's sovereignty over its land," Mubarak said.

The second point at issue is the Israeli proposal of closing Al-Shuhada Street to Hebron, which is frequented by Jewish settlers to Palestinian vehicles. "If the street is closed, Hebron will be split into an Israeli Hebron on one side and a Palestinian Hebron on the other," Mubarak explained. "How can Israel stop Palestinians from commuting on their own land?"

The third is another Israeli proposal that Palestinian police taking part in joint patrols with their Israeli counterparts should go unarmed. "The Israeli soldiers would carry arms, but the Palestinians would only be allowed batons," he said. "It's impossible."

Mubarak said that Egypt is not required to find alternative proposals for the Palestinians, "because solutions lie in their own hands" but its role is to facilitate and support their decisions.

He added that the forces working against peace appear to have won so far, judging by the deadlock in the peace process.

Mubarak also said he does not expect the US to intensify its role in the peace process until next February or March.

Cable to Bill

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak sent a cable to US President Bill Clinton, congratulating him on his re-election for a second term in the White House, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told reporters yesterday. Mubarak went on to express hope that the US would play an even more active role in Middle East peace-making following the re-election of President Bill Clinton.

"We hope and we are confident that Egyptian-American cooperation for peace will gain in strength so that the movement toward a just peace can be consolidated."

In control

RUSSIAN leader Boris Yeltsin reclaimed his presidential powers and control of the nuclear button barely 24 hours after delegating them to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

US cardiologist Michael DeBakey who oversaw the operation, said five bypasses were performed on Yeltsin's blocked arteries during the seven-hour surgery Tuesday and said he should fully recover within six to eight weeks.

Cleopatra, her name adorning sundry paraphernalia, was the tutelary goddess of-invented at the 3 November press conference in which Franck Goddio disclosed the results of his archaeological survey of Alexandria's Eastern Harbour.

Operation "Cleopatra '96" yielded a series of accurate maps, the first of their kind, of submerged sites in the Eastern Harbour that should allow for a re-evaluation of previous hypotheses about the topography of the Ptolemaic capital.

The sites in the portion of the Eastern Harbour surveyed — approximately from modern day Sileh Promontory to Ramleh Station — have long been submerged. In addition to subsidence it was, suggests Goddio, a major earthquake in 365 AD, followed by a tidal wave, that destroyed them.

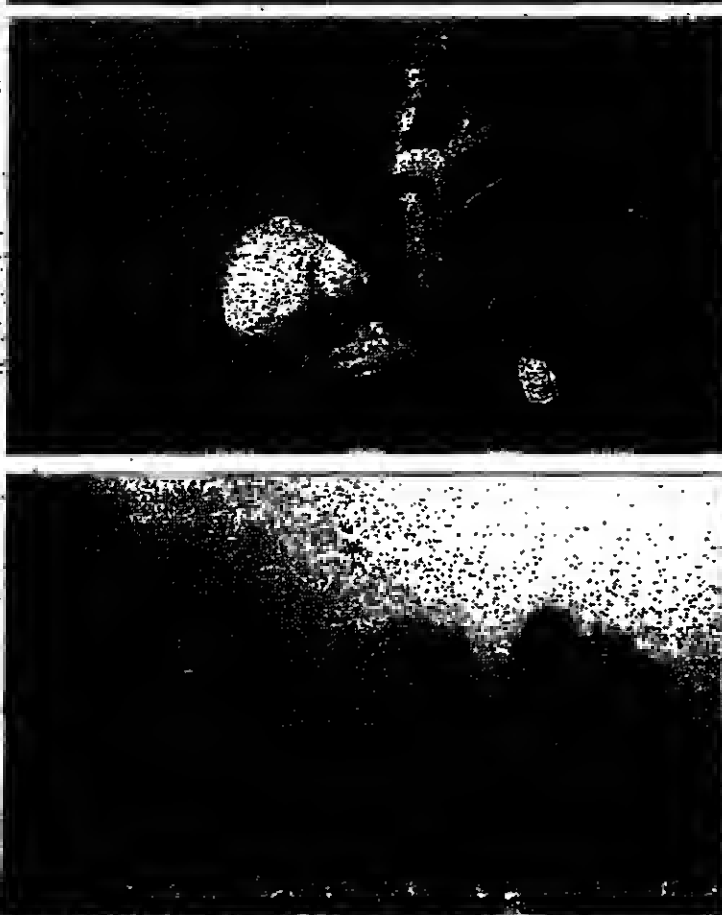
Enshrined in myth and legend — from Plutarch to Elizabeth Taylor via Shakespeare — the sites have long attracted adventurers and scholars alike. Previous scholars drew hypothetical maps of Ptolemaic Alexandria's Portus Magnus and its edifices based on contemporary descriptions and the glimpses of ruins possible before pumped sewage muddied the water. Of descriptions by classical writers, the detailed report by Strabo, who visited Egypt some five years after Cleopatra's death, appears to have had the greatest influence on such reconstructions.

Describing the Eastern Harbour from the vantage point of the voyager arriving by sea, Strabo identifies the Pharos (the Lighthouse) to the right and Cape Lochias (of which the much smaller Sileh Promontory is all that is visible today) to the left. He mentions the royal palaces on Cape Lochias. He speaks of "the harbour that was dug by the hand of man and is hidden from view, the private property of the kings", of Antirrhodos, "an island lying off the artificial harbour, which has both a royal palace and a small harbour", and the Poseidion, "an elbow of land" on which the Temple of Poseidon stands. It is from this elbow, he says, that "Antony added a causeway projecting still further, and on the extremity of it built a royal lodge which he called Timonium". This, we are told by Strabo and Plutarch, was after his defeat at Actium when, forsaken by his friends and allegedly betrayed by Cleopatra, he returned to Alexandria, wanting to emulate the confirmed misanthrope, Timon the Athenian.

In the 19th century map compiled by Mahmoud Pasha El-Falaki — the blue print followed by later cartographers — the identification of ancient streets was based on excavations, the outlines of submerged landmarks on classical descriptions. In the maps of Nerousos Bey and Boni, among others, the royal harbour is rendered in the form of a *kibrot* (or chest) located at the base of Cape Lochias where it joins the mainland. The maps all place Antirrhodos off Cape Lochias, and place the Poseidion peninsula with the Timonium to the west.

In a 1992 preliminary survey of the Eastern Harbour Goddio used electronic sounding techniques but electronic currents from the modern city confused the data, though "at least it told us where not to look". This summer, however, Goddio employed a "differential global positioning system (D-GPS)" a technique which — through satellite and a land-based position — allows divers to position and chart a given location to within 30cm. Among the most spectacular finds in the maps that emerged are the contours of Cape Lochias and the shape of the royal harbour.

The place where Cleopatra's barge, "like a burnished throne", was moored has at last been identified in an underwater survey. Hala Halim reports on this, and other discoveries, disclosed last week



Clockwise from top: a diver holding a Ptolemaic marble female head; map showing the submerged sites; a sphinx



(photos courtesy of The Hilti Foundation)

Poseidon. On one man-made pier to the east of the peninsula were lead ingots, apparently ready to be loaded onto a ship, seeming to confirm the theory that the submergence of the site was precipitated by a sudden disaster. To the west of the peninsula, on another man-made pier, the team found slabs of rock and red granite columns — the site, they argued, of the Timonium.

The team identified the island of Antirrhodos as facing the west of the peninsula. A forest of huge granite columns in the centre of the island, together with blocks inscribed in hieroglyphics indicates that this may have been the location of Ptolemaic palaces. And among the less antique finds on Antirrhodos was the wreckage of a Second World War aeroplane lying atop the relics of Cleopatra's palace.

While artefacts have yet to be fully studied, the main aim of the survey, Goddio stresses, was to map the contours of sites. One reservation, however, has been expressed about the maps — a great deal remains beneath the sand and the survey should not be considered exhaustive until that sand has been removed. This, Goddio says, is already on the cards. A mathematician by training, Goddio's credentials for the survey have been questioned. But he has previous experience in underwater archaeology, notably excavating a Spanish galleon submerged off the Philippines, and does not claim to be an expert on Ptolemaic archaeology.

"My role is to set up the right expedition with top experts in the field and act as *chef d'orchestre*," in the survey, funded by the Hilti Foundation, Goddio called upon the expertise of marine biologists Hassan El-Bara, and archaeologists Hassan El-Fakharani and Aziza Said of Alexandria University.

Professor Mustafa El-Abbadi, author of *The Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria*, expressed mixed reactions about the survey, questioning not the location of the Timonium but its very existence.

Given that Antony retreated in disarray in 31BC, and killed himself in 30BC, El-Abbadi argues that it is unlikely that he would have had time to build the Timonium. "Strabo was a propagandist for the Romans so we need not take the Timonium theory seriously." As for the mapping of the royal harbour, he has nothing but the highest praise. "To be able to locate it to this degree of certainty, and to discover that its location is further North than had been thought — with all the dykes and the components of a harbour, is a wonderful addition to our knowledge."

Clinton yawned into office

Tarek El-Tablawy discovers the most surprising thing about the 1996 US presidential election was that anyone stayed awake to watch it

It was an election that began with little fanfare — and, somewhat appropriately, ended on Tuesday with even less. Any mood slumping that threatened to taint the proceedings early on in the Clinton-Dole race for the White House never truly materialised — much like the pre-polling enthusiasm of those attending the all-night election gala hosted by the US Embassy in Cairo's Marriott Hotel.

For better or for worse, the election is now over. And it is more than obvious that Dole got off on the wrong foot, perhaps because, as a young American businessman at the party noted, "his other one was always in his pocket". In more eloquent terms, one analyst explained that Dole lost because he was not able to galvanise popular support on any one issue. Economic prosperity and satisfaction with the quality of their lives was another reason cited for why Americans were so intent on re-electing Clinton. But whatever the reason, as Bob Woodward, the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist from the *Washington Post* remarked, "The only surprise is that there was no surprise". Clinton is, for the second and final time, president, having won close to 50 per cent of the votes while Dole captured 41 per cent.

By dawn, judging by the applause from the few stragglers left at the party, who eschewed the warmth and comfort of hearth and home, kith and kin, to listen to the pundits pontificate via five CNN and CNBC broadcasts, this announcement was not surprising. Their lack of enthusiasm, disturbing as it may be, nonetheless, reflects the electorate's prevalent mood throughout this campaign (only 49 per cent of eligible voters cast their ballots, the lowest level since 1924).

In a series of informal polls conducted by *Al-Ahram Weekly* at the embassy's red, white and blue gala affair, statistics revealed that the majority of those surveyed about the outcome of the elections were not overly-impressed with the fact that Clinton is the first Democratic president since Franklin D. Roosevelt to win consecutive re-election. Nor, for that matter, were they particularly pleased with the choice they had made. They were, however, impressed with the decor and the burgers. Of those polled, 68 per cent said they voted for Clinton and 26 per cent for Dole.

But, of that 68 per cent, 59 per cent admitted that they voted for Clinton, not because they agreed with his policies, but because, "he was the lesser of two evils."

Some were quick to point out that the 1996 campaign was devoid of issues, substance and even maddening. In short, said one member of the US military, "It was boring". Others were a little more subtle. "Faced with choosing between two candidates like these," said one irate American who wished to remain anonymous, "I'd rather renounce my citizenship."

The over 75 Egyptian-American voters at the party were equally and sardonically quizzical. In another informal *Weekly* poll, roughly 70 per cent of them said they voted for Dole — mainly because of his promised 15 per cent across-the-board tax cut. But when asked who they thought would win, the answer was a resounding, if somewhat dismayed, "Clinton".

Even before the party dragged on into the early hours of the morning, the Americans and Egyptians in attendance were slightly subdued, exhibiting little of the mirth and excitement usually associated with long-awaited poll results. Instead, they were discussing a variety of issues such as the bands performing, the food being served (the pasta garnered rave reviews), the lack of imported beer and whether the Klingons on the hit TV show, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, really were the strongest alien creatures in the universe. However, when pulled aside, they were more than forthright in their statements — especially when it came to bashing Clinton, Dole and the two-party political system.

"Clinton has changed his views throughout his presidency," said Joshua Pines, an AUC student. So, what does that say about his character, integrity and leadership abilities? "Oh, I never thought he had any to begin with," Joshua, incidentally, voted for Dole. "No man can be for everything, against nothing, and still make decisions," said Wade, a young man attached to the embassy. Dole or Clinton? "May the better man win," he said before walking off.

Foreigners at the party were as perplexed and frustrated as the Americans. "As a foreigner, I've seen nothing that distinguishes one candidate from the other," said Sean from New Zealand. "But these elections have gotten so much publicity that I know more about them than the ones in my own country."

Voter confusion and apathy, however, coupled with the fact that Dole, as Megan, a 35-year-old housewife put it, "did not present himself as a leader," was of tremendous benefit to Clinton. But, forced to make do with what they have, the voters, by now a little more cheerful after a few Stella Locals, placed campaign finance reform, the environment, welfare and bipartisanship at the top of their list of dreams for Clinton's second term. Oddly enough, during a live Worldnet satellite link between Cairo and Washington, Eleanor Clift, a senior *Newsweek* magazine correspondent, pointed out that it is precisely these kinds of initiatives that Clinton will tackle. "During his second term, there will be no big, bold ideas" on his agenda, said Clift. More likely than not, he will, instead, approach the issue of welfare in a piecemeal, bipartisan manner, touting such banners as education and public job programmes to aid destitute mothers. To help him implement these plans, he will turn to Congress, which after the elections, is still led by the Republicans in both houses. Contrary to popular belief, Clinton, it is being claimed, does not really want a Democratic Congress whose members will eventually veer away from Clinton's policies as the 1998 Congressional elections draw near. Why?

"Because Clinton calls himself a Democrat," but he's really a closet Republican," said Nancy, a disgruntled Clinton-Core supporter. "He'd rather deal with a de-fanged Gingrich than tackle an eager Gephardt who has presidential aspirations of his own."



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Progress report

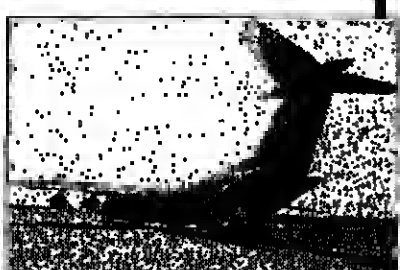
AT A MEETING on Tuesday, Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri briefed opposition party leaders, or their representatives, on the government's efforts to speed up economic development and give a push to economic reform.

The meeting, on the eve of a new parliamentary session, was the third between El-Ganzouri, who formed his cabinet in January, and the opposition. Represented at the meeting were the Nasserist, Tagammu, Wafd, Labour, Liberal, Umma, Social Justice, Young Egypt and the Democratic Unionist parties.

According to Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif, El-Ganzouri said that under successive five-year economic plans, 1.8 million feddans of land have been reclaimed for agriculture and 19 industrial cities established. The crude oil production rose from 32 million tons in 1982 to 45 million tons in 1996.

El-Ganzouri also explained to the opposition an ambitious project to develop a string of oases in the Western Desert, officially dubbed the New Valley, by digging an irrigation canal to channel water from the Nile river. And as a result of economic reform agreements with the International Monetary Fund, Egypt has been forgiven \$24.5 billion in foreign debts, El-Ganzouri said.

Speaking for the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, Dr Hilmi Murad demanded that meetings between the prime minister and the opposition should be held at shorter intervals. Mustafa Kamel Murad, leader of the Liberal Party, suggested that a meeting should be held once every three months.



Joint exercises

EGYPTIAN and American transports staged 50 sorties on Tuesday to redeploy troops and vehicles from one air force to another at the start of the second stage of the joint air Cobra exercise. In all, 1,000 troops and 150 vehicles were transported by Egyptian C-130's and American C-141's. The Egyptian transports staged 35 sorties and the Americans 15.

Drug haul

SECURITY authorities on Tuesday seized 50 kilograms of heroin and about half a ton of hashish in what was described as the largest ever haul of drugs smuggled into the country. The narcotics were seized after they were dropped from a boat near the southern Red Sea port of Nuweiba. Police exchanged fire with the smugglers — five Egyptians and a Jordanian — but they managed to escape into neighbouring mountains in the Sinai. At least one of the traffickers was believed to have been injured. The drugs were said to have a street value of LE56 million.



Mubarak and Assad rule out Madrid II

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak and Syria's Hafez Al-Assad told Israel on Monday that it should not feel threatened by military manoeuvres taking place in neighbouring Arab countries. Mubarak stopped over in Damascus on his way back home from the Group of 15 summit in Harare, capital of Zimbabwe. Following talks at Damascus airport, Assad defended Syria's right to hold military manoeuvres at a joint news conference. "Every army has the right to hold military exercises," Assad said, "but the Israelis interpreted these moves in another way."

Israel, which had ended its own exercises in the

Golan Heights 10 days earlier, strongly objected to the Syrian manoeuvres as well as troop movements in Lebanon.

Mubarak, likewise, expressed surprise that Israel felt concern for the troop movements and Egypt's Badr '96 war games in September. "All the armies in the world carry out manoeuvres and training so as to remain in shape," Mubarak said. Israel should know that exercises are not intended to mean military operations, Mubarak added.

Both presidents also agreed that the terms of the 1991 Madrid conference, which initiated the peace process, should not be altered. "Our position is that

there is no need for a Madrid II because this means that we have to begin from zero," Mubarak said. "Just because there are obstacles we [shouldn't] call for Madrid II and go back to square one."

Mubarak added that those who "ask for peace and land together are asking for the impossible. There is no alternative to the principle of [trading] land-for-peace." Assad said that Madrid II was suggested by the Israelis to cancel Madrid I.

"The only option is the implementation of what was agreed upon," Mubarak said, "and there is no other proposal." He cautioned that if agreements are not implemented, confidence in the peace process will be shaken. "Even others who signed treaties will suspect that [Israel] may begin to abrogate those agreements," he warned. "This is very dangerous."

Mubarak again brushed aside speculation that there will be an Arab summit soon, declaring there is no "grave danger" which warrants a conference at such a high level.

Assad said he could not second guess whether the US role will change after the presidential elections, but said that US President Bill Clinton "was honourable in handling the peace process over the past few years."

Ganzouri gets tough

As the government imposed tougher penalties for construction offences, a week-long search for survivors and bodies buried under the debris of a collapsed building in Heliopolis was called off. Shaden Shehab reports

Hopes were abandoned that survivors and more bodies might still be buried under the debris of a collapsed building in Heliopolis, and a week-long search of the rubble was called off last Sunday. A total of 65 bodies had been recovered by rescue workers from the debris of the 13-storey apartment building, which collapsed on 27 October. At least 22 people, including two young women, one Egyptian and one American, who spent 36 hours buried together under the mound of rubble, survived the disaster.

As the nation mourned the victims of the tragedy, Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri used the state of emergency that has been in force since 1981 to issue a 'martial order', imposing tougher penalties for construction violations.

Ganzouri set a minimum of five years' imprisonment, and a maximum of seven, for failure to meet the technical specifications of design, supervision or construction or failure to comply with the construction plans on the basis of which the building licence was issued. If the building collapses entirely or partly or becomes dilapidated as a result of these violations, the punishment was raised to a minimum of seven years with hard labour. If the violation results in the death of one person or more, or the injury of more than three persons, the offenders will be punished by a minimum of 10 years' imprisonment with hard labour.

The martial order also set a minimum sentence of one year's imprisonment for making alterations or adding extra floors without obtaining a licence. And, for the first time, these punishments were made applicable to municipal officials who turn a blind eye to such viola-

tions in addition to the owners of the building and its construction engineers.

The order was issued in response to the national outcry against those responsible for the Heliopolis disaster, and to contain the alarming increase in construction violations. The owner of the collapsed building, Raouf Wissa Ibrahim, has been detained on charges of adding the top five floors without a permit. Three construction engineers were also arrested for carrying out renovation work on the ground floor, allegedly causing one of the pillars supporting the building to crack. Although a committee of professors of construction engineering has not yet released its report on the causes of the collapse, Ibrahim and the three engineers have been officially charged with manslaughter.

Rescue workers, assisted by teams from Germany, Japan and Hungary, called off the search after all hopes of finding other bodies in the ruins faded. The Japanese team, using high-tech detectors, had earlier concluded that the rubble contained no survivors. Most of the recovered bodies were in the stairwell area, which became known as the "death trap". Some were locked together, including that of a mother holding her dead baby.

Among the dead bodies recovered were the wife and three children of Lutfi Moussa, a diplomat with the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Cairo. Moussa accompanied the bodies on a special plane, sent last Friday by Saudi Arabia's Defence Minister, Prince Sultan, to bring them home for burial.

Bulldozers and other heavy equipment have moved most of the debris from the site, while workers are

slowly demolishing the building's rear section, which remained standing. The demolition teams worked with their bare hands on Sunday, using cutting equipment to free twisted pieces of metal and concrete from the huge pile of rubble in an attempt to stop the uncollapsed part from falling before tenants' belongings could be removed. Cranes lifted away the larger pieces of masonry. Residents of four neighbouring buildings evacuated after the tragedy had still not returned home a week later.

The disaster has led to a spate of reports that other buildings are also on the verge of collapse. On Friday, police evacuated a 20-year-old, 12-storey building in Heliopolis, which local officials claimed was about to fall. Magdi Nassif, the owner of an electrical appliance shop on the ground floor, and two of his cousins, were arrested for knocking down pillars to make way for air-conditioning pipes — causing the building to lean slightly.

Four other buildings in Nasr City were evacuated on Monday. The first was deemed unsafe after construction engineers demolished walls on the ground and first floors to make space for a bank branch. The three other buildings included a number of unauthorised floors.

In the city of Giza, part of Greater Cairo, the local authorities evacuated two adjacent buildings on Friday. One of them was leaning slightly and would have knocked down the other building had it collapsed. An old eight-storey building in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria was condemned and is to be demolished, and three others were evacuated pending an engineers' report. Meanwhile, the governor of the

Nile Delta province of Gharbiya has decreed that no extra floors may be built on top of existing buildings.

However, experts warn that panic measures can only touch the tip of the iceberg.

"It has been found that 98 per cent of the buildings in Nasr City and 97 per cent of those in Mohandessin and Dokki violate the regulations," Omayma Salahuddin, head of the government's building inspectors, told a local newspaper. "We have the case of seven buildings whose file now contains 380 pages of orders that construction should stop and that building work be dismantled, but none of them have been carried out."

Prime Minister El-Ganzouri denied that the violations amounted to thousands, "as some have claimed lately." He said the order which he issued was designed "to protect the lives of citizens and not to mount an aggression on their freedom."

The government, he continued, hoped to carry out a comprehensive survey of all buildings that were constructed without a permit, or in violation of the terms of their permit, in Greater Cairo and Alexandria. Immediate measures would be taken once the survey is completed, he assured.

In a related development, six men arrested last week for looting the site of the collapsed building were sentenced on Sunday. One of them got two years in jail, while the other five were sentenced to one year's imprisonment. Two suspected looters were acquitted and the case of a third was referred to juvenile court. The looters pretended to be helping with the rescue operation in order to steal jewellery, electrical appliances and other items from the rubble.

Upholding Arab rights in Jerusalem

Palestinians, Egyptians and other Arabs gathered in Assiut last week for a seminar on the future of Jerusalem. Doaa El-Bay attended

Speakers at a seminar on the future of Jerusalem were in agreement that the Arab and Muslim states should provide the Palestinians with more active support in order to preserve Arab rights in the holy city.

The seminar, held last week in the southern city of Assiut, issued a concluding communiqué which emphasised the importance of promoting the Palestinian presence in the city, which Israel views as its eternal capital. To help achieve this objective, Palestinian settlement in Jerusalem should be encouraged and Arabs, Muslims and Christians should make contributions to a Jerusalem fund, the communiqué said. It appealed to the Arabs to build on Arab-owned lands to prevent them from falling prey to Israeli expansionist policies.

The communiqué also urged that the normalisation of relations be used to put pressure on Israel to resolve pending problems, including the future of Jerusalem, through negotiations.

Faisal El-Husseini, a member of the Palestinian National Authority in charge of Jerusalem affairs, said the Palestinians of Jerusalem need a budget of \$30 million a year to uphold Arab rights. "This is a small amount for the Arabs to contribute," he said.

Mohamed Nabil Foad, a military expert and former head of the Egyptian Armed Forces Strategic Centre, agreed that Arab support was vital to resolve the Palestinian issue in the Palestinians' favour. The Arabs have to stand behind the Palestinian negotiators, he said. "Whoever imagines that the Arabs have lost all their trump cards is mistaken. We still have the weapons of oil, Arab boycott and normalisation," Foad said.

As for the Palestinians, they should work to keep the issue of Jerusalem constantly in the limelight, Foad said. Rich Palestinian expatriates should provide those inside with the financial support necessary to build a Palestinian state, he added.

Haitham Al-Kilani, the Palestinian editor-in-chief of *Arab Affairs* magazine, was pessimistic about the effect of the delay in opening final status negotiations, which will cover Jerusalem. He feared that by the time the negotiations open, the Palestinians will be confronted with a "de facto situation" and find there is no land to negotiate over.

Al-Kilani suggested the establishment of Arab and Islamic people's committees to raise the issue of Jerusalem in international forums and use other means to escalate the struggle against Israeli policies. "What we need is an Arab-Islamic project that is as strong and effective as the enemy's project," he said.

Khalil Al-Tafajki, head of the Jerusalem Topography Department, warned that the Arabs stand to lose their rights in the holy city unless they show solidarity and coordinate their efforts. "We [Arabs] have the ability to build 15,000 housing units, change the green areas to construction areas and increase the Palestinian population inside Jerusalem," he said.

An appeal to the international community to reactivate the dormant UN Resolution 181, which recommended the internationalisation of Jerusalem as the best means of protecting its religious sites, was made by Hani Al-Hourani, head of the New Jordan Studies Centre. The resolution, he explained, "stipulated that the Jerusalem region — not only the city — be considered as a separate entity."

According to Lamine El-Motei from the Egyptian Supreme Council of Culture, the Arabs can regain their rights in Jerusalem by two means: the unity of Arab ranks, which is the responsibility of the Arab League, and the preservation of democracy and human rights, which is the responsibility of Arab governments.

Awaiting death in an Israeli jail

Pressure is mounting for the release of an Egyptian prisoner in poor health after spending the last 20 years in Israeli jails. Dina Ezzat reports

The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) has launched a campaign to secure the release of Mohamed Soliman Salem El-Sawarka, an Egyptian sentenced to imprisonment in Israel for launching attacks against Israeli occupation troops in the Sinai desert during and after the 1967 War. El-Sawarka, who has been in Israeli prisons for the last 20 years, is reported to be on the verge of dying. Technically, he has 430 more years to serve.

The EOHR hopes the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and international human rights groups will put pressure on the Israeli government to free El-Sawarka on health grounds.

El-Sawarka was arrested in his hometown of El-Arish in the early 1970s for staging attacks resulting in the deaths of Israeli soldiers and the destruction of ammunition warehouses. He was tried and convicted by an Israeli military court.

"Since then, he has been moved from one Israeli prison to another, subjected to brutal treatment and used as a guinea pig by medical students, who performed successive operations on him, causing his health to deteriorate and denying him adequate medical care," said Mohamed Mounib, head of the EOHR.

Gamal Mahmoud, a Lebanese who served time with El-Sawarka, said medical students operated five times on his stomach. "It became bloated like the belly of a pregnant woman in her ninth month. It cannot digest food any more and he is living on liquids," said Mahmoud. The last time Mahmoud saw El-Sawarka was in July 1994 and "at the time, he was barely alive."

According to Mounib, the EOHR has compiled reports "that confirm that El-Sawarka is in very poor health. He is almost blind, he can barely move, he suffers serious digestive problems and his morale is low. He is actually dy-

ing." El-Sawarka's poor health "is one reason we have to intensify the campaign. This is a humanitarian case of a man who risked his life for his country and is now depending on this country to get him back home so that he can die among his family and people."

El-Sawarka has mailed an appeal from his prison to President Hosni Mubarak. "From the prison where I am undergoing all forms of suffering... I plead with you, Mr President, in the name of our dear country and the name of our martyrs who paid with their lives for our nation to be free... I am on the verge of dying and all I want before my hour arrives is to see my daughter, even briefly."

Samira, El-Sawarka's daughter, is living with her mother in the same house in El-Arish where her father was arrested. At the time, the mother was a few weeks pregnant. "I never saw my father," Samira said. "My mother is always telling me about him. But now that I know he is dying, I really want to spend some time with him."

The EOHR is seeking the support of the Foreign Ministry in its campaign for El-Sawarka's release. "We wrote a lengthy letter to the minister of foreign affairs, pleading with him to take all the measures necessary to win a pardon for this man," said Mounib. "But so far, we have had no reply."

The EOHR is also lobbying some international human rights organisations to put pressure on the Israeli government, a task Mounib acknowledges will not be easy. "I know the inhuman Israeli government is a difficult one but we have to do something," he asserted.

Previous attempts to secure El-Sawarka's release were refused by the Israeli authorities, who insisted that the approval of the Israeli defence minister was required. That approval was always

denied. Two years ago, Egypt and Israel made a deal to exchange El-Sawarka for two Israeli spies captured in Cairo.

"It was very close. A representative of the Egyptian Embassy in Tel Aviv came to the prison and promised El-Sawarka that he would be freed soon," said Mahmoud. But the deal fell through for reasons which remain unknown.

According to Lutfi Elewa, press counsellor at the Egyptian Embassy in Tel Aviv: "The Egyptian Consulate is very concerned with the matter. The full file of this case is currently undergoing a close examination."

"We are hoping that the president will personally intervene," commented Mounib. "I am sure that there is a way to get this man back home before it is too late."

For the past 18 months, the EOHR has also been following and documenting cases of Egyptian prisoners of war captured by Israeli troops during the 1956 and 1967 wars. So far, the group has documented about 100 cases of POWs who were either brutally tortured or killed by the Israeli army. "A report on these cases will be issued by the end of next week," said Mounib. "The report will specify the sites of several mass graves in the Sinai desert where Egyptian prisoners were either buried alive or interred after being killed by Israeli troops."

The EOHR report is part of a larger effort by Egyptian human rights groups to investigate the fate of Egyptian prisoners of war, which began after a retired Israeli army officer told the Israeli press about the brutalities to which Egyptian prisoners of war had been subjected.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

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The price of compromise

An unprecedented occurrence: the United Nations secretary-general has been accused by the United States of being "an obstacle to reform", incompetent, as well as pretentious, a megalomaniac, and maybe even corrupt. The Clinton administration is hardly overdoing on subtlety in its efforts to get rid of an undesirable. Boutros Boutros-Ghali has been ordered not to seek a renewal of his mandate — otherwise the US government will use its veto. The sole global super power has declared war on a man who has virtually no means of defending himself. But he does have the sympathy of the overwhelming majority of UN member states. What difference does that make? coldly wonders Madeleine Albright, US ambassador to the UN: her government's decision is "final". The Egyptian diplomat must go, whatever the international community's decision. The challenge, this time, is a global one.

Worse, the accusations, most often anonymous and transmitted through the press, are made without a shred of evidence. One of them, spread at the end of July, is underhanded. Conversing freely with a group of journalists, one of Ms Albright's collaborators, Mr Rubin, let slip: "The US government intends to observe very closely the way Mr. Boutros-Ghali uses UN staff to promote his re-election." As an example, he mentioned that a high-ranking official had toured Africa on US taxpayers' money. The UN head was therefore suspected of misusing public funds. Mr Rubin may have forgotten that Washington has refused to pay its dues to the UN for many years. Indignant, UN spokeswoman Sylvana Fox, a US citizen, has publicly accused her government of "practices reminiscent of the McCarthy era" (the hunt for alleged communists in the 1950s).

Such intensity could lead one to believe that Mr Boutros-Ghali, while appearing to be a charming and courteous diplomat, is in fact a dangerous and subversive element, working in the shadows to undermine the "new world order" decreed by President Bush in 1991 at the end of the Gulf War. Reality, however, is somewhat different. From an influential and wealthy family, several members of which have occupied the highest state offices since the beginning of the century (his grandfather, notably, was prime minister during the British occupation), Boutros-Ghali is perceived as an enlightened conservative in his home country. Unlike most members of his family — inveterate royalists — he decisively rallied to the republic and supported Gamal Abdel Nasser's Third World policies. Yet he never diminished his opposition to the "socialist laws", which, incidentally, stripped him of a number of his possessions. Nasser's successor, Anwar El-Sadat, propelled this professor of international law to the peaks of Egyptian diplomacy, thus rewarding Boutros-Ghali for having had the courage to accompany the president to Jerusalem in November 1977 for the peace talks with Israel. Boutros-Ghali, then very popular with the US, was one of the architects of the Camp David Accords. Lambasted by the Arab nationalists, the left and the Islamists, he loyally served first Sadat and then President Mubarak.

Appointed vice-prime minister by the latter, Boutros-Ghali seemed the ideal candidate for the general secretary at the end of 1991. The US media, among others, emphasised the advantages of his background: African, Arab but Christian (Boutros-Ghali is a Copt), married to a descendant of an influential Egyptian Jewish family, anti-communist and a firm supporter of peace with Israel: his writings and his practice had made him a recognised and appreciated specialist in international relations. Unexpectedly, however, these qualifications did not secure US backing. It was believed at the time that US reluctance was due only to the candidate's close ties with France, which actively supported him. The Egyptian diplomat, whose first language was French as much as it was Arabic, the brilliant recipient of a doctoral degree from the Sorbonne, is militant in advocating Frenchness. It is due to his efforts that Egypt has subscribed to the various organisations responsible for propagating the use of French throughout the world. "French," he is fond of repeating, "is not the property of one country: it is a civilisation, a language of cooperation." During the Cold War, he had added: "It is also the language of diplomacy par excellence, since it is non-aligned."

Lacking a credible alternative, the US resigned itself to voting for "France's candidate". Was he "ungrateful", as certain French officials have hinted? Probably to dispel political ambiguity, the new secretary-general removed high-ranking French UN officials from their posts while encouraging the nomination of Americans to key offices, to the extent that he was accused of favouritism. Strangely, the US administration's misgivings remained intact. It became clear that this mistrust was not due so much to the suspect's "Francophilia" as it was to other reasons, related to the role that the US sought to play during the post-Cold War era.

The CIA report which had alerted President Bush before the 1991 election was not contradicted by the new UN secretary-general's behaviour. The American secret service, fond of psychological profiles, is said to



photo: S. K. Ibrahim

have concluded the report with the claim that Boutros-Ghali was "uncontrollable" and "unpredictable" — quite the opposite of what the US administration would have wished for in managing the international organisation, once it had been stripped of the traditional counter-weight of the non-aligned countries, and more importantly, the communist bloc. The demolition of the Berlin Wall had already allowed the US to run the Gulf War almost as it pleased. The method, in its view, was as good as a model: Boutros-Ghali's predecessor, Perez de Cuellar, had understood that times had changed; he was careful to play the game according to the rules dictated by the new international balance of power.

The end of the Cold War offered Boutros-Ghali another perspective. He deemed that the UN, freed from the constraints imposed by East-West rivalries, could and should develop, fully face its responsibilities, expand and reinforce them in the interest of peace, security, development and democracy in the world. Practising what he preached, he put forth two fundamental documents, respectively titled "Agenda for Peace" and "Agenda for Development", in which he outlined a sweeping reform programme. Although he had carried out these studies at the invitation of the Security Council, and although they had aroused much interest in Europe and especially in the Third World, his suggestions provoked much scepticism, snickering and cringing in the US. Madeleine Albright, expressing her government's opinion with the tactlessness for which she is rightly renowned, found it fitting to declare that the secretary-general's only intention was to increase his own prerogatives. His proposals — the establishment of a "preventive diplomacy" system, able to prevent confrontations, the creation of rapid deployment units, staffed, armed and trained in various member countries and placed in the UN's service to snuff the sparks of potential conflicts, even the creation of a tax to finance the organisation's operations — these, especially, were found quite out of place by Washington. Boutros-Ghali would do better to act as the UN's "chief administrative officer", as Madeleine Albright snickered in a speech made on 25 June 1995, during the UN's 50th anniversary celebrations. The omnipotent US, in other words, wanted to deal only with a simple bureaucrat who failed to satisfy one of his bosses. But how has Boutros-Ghali posed an "obstacle to reform"? Was he not prompt

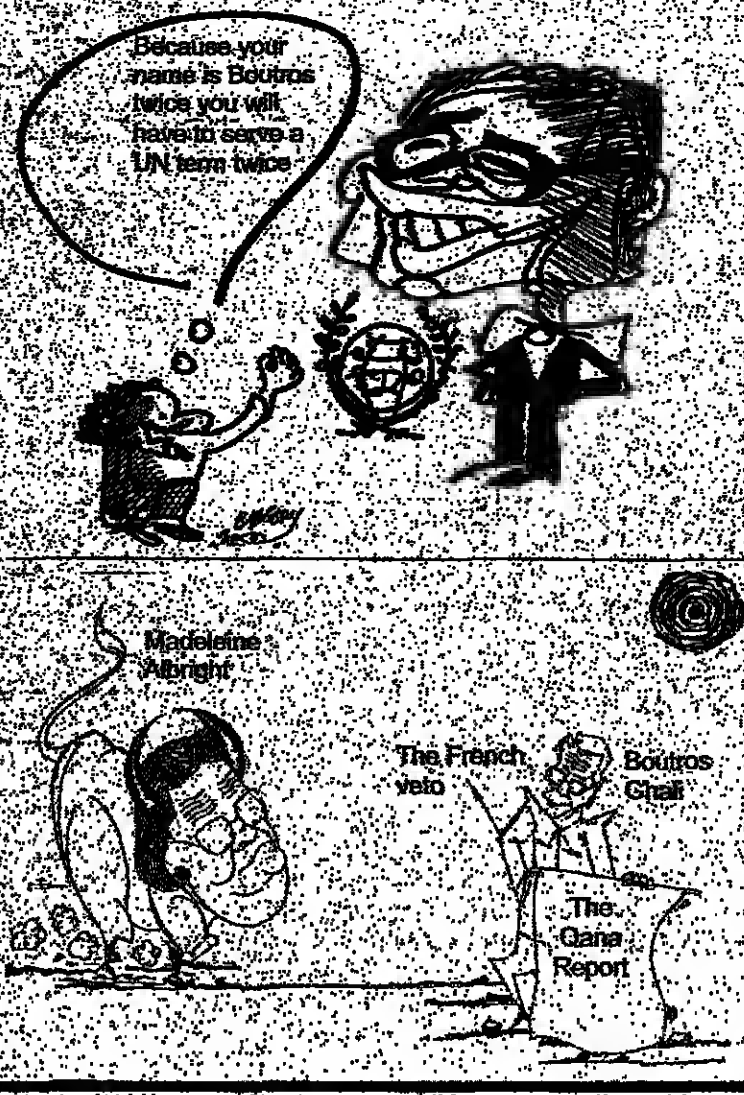
in acquiescing to the US's wish that the international organisation be "streamlined"? He went to work right away, cooperating with a US expert, Joseph Connor, whom he named associate administrative secretary-general, after having consulted Washington. The results obtained are generally considered remarkable: UN staff has been cut by 25 per cent, dropping from 12,000 staffers to 9,000; only 8,000 will remain in two years. The number of departments has been cut from 20 to 12. The most lucrative 48 posts at the top of the hierarchy have been slashed to 37, a 40 per cent cut since 1984. Despite the increase in UN activity, the 1996-97 budget is \$117 million lower than the previous one.

The US government, which refuses to pay the arrears on its debts to the international organisation as long as its policies are not implemented, claims that these results are negligible, and notes that the UN's global expenses were on the rise. Boutros-Ghali, however, has reiterated that the unprecedented financial crisis plaguing the organisation is due not to current expenses but to the cost of peace-keeping operations. These costs have quadrupled since 1992, rising from \$600 million to \$2.6 billion this year 17 new "blue helmet" operations have been launched in the past four years, with the US's approval. This has not prevented Washington from refusing

to pay its dues — \$1.5 billion dollars, half of the organisation's total debts (\$2.9 billion by last July). The secretary-general has repudiated the US, often without naming names. In a speech given in London last January, he denounced the "dishonesty of those who render the UN ineffectual by depriving it of necessary funds, while refusing to provide the funds due to it under the pretext that it is ineffectual."

The secretary-general's polemical tone is born of the exasperation caused by the US's increasing defiance. Washington's debts to the UN have doubled since his election. But his tone is also natural in a man who willingly admits that he likes to "provoke", and finds such provocation indispensable to his role. As astonishing as this may seem, the former head of Egyptian diplomacy is adamant that "one cannot be a diplomat when one insists on upholding one's principles." This professor of international law-turned-politician knows how to be as straightforward as Ms Albright, whose "vulgarity" in attacking him he deplores. He complains publicly that the "US complicates his work", that the members of the Security Council charge him with "impossible tasks", that they are trying to place the responsibility for their failures on the shoulders of the UN executive. "I work for 185 bosses," he often remarks in an illustration of the complexity of his position and the limits to his author-

Behind the US smear campaign against UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali lies a bid to take over the international organisation, writes Eric Rouleau. In the post-Cold War era, global challenges set high stakes



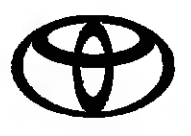
fending US "sovereignty" against the "transgressions" of the "supranational state" that the UN has supposedly become under Boutros-Ghali. It is true that Bob Dole has carried off an extraordinary feat: bringing to the attention of the American public a theme which did not interest it, that of the United Nations. The Republican candidate had even made the theme his battle cry. Pandering to his compatriots' belligerent nationalism, he never tired of repeating that "Washington and not New York, the US president and not US forces will intervene abroad." Dole has acquired the somewhat unsavoury habit of playing for laughs by referring to Mr Boutros-Ghali as Boo-Boo.

Dole himself is being egged on by the right wing of his party, which has amply demonstrated its power in Congress. Jesse Helms, for instance, the president of the Senate Commission on Foreign Affairs, was cited in the *Wall Street Journal* (21 August 1996) as proposing that the UN be given an "ultimatum": either it must "radically reform" (in other words, renounce on virtually all its humanitarian missions) before 2000, or the US will withdraw permanently from the international organisation. In the same vein, Republican deputy Joe Scarborough went ahead and submitted to Congress a bill for the US's immediate withdrawal from the UN and its entrance to the "League of Democracies", yet to be founded. North versus South? The US versus Europe? James Phillips, a political scientist attached to the Heritage Foundation, seems to be suggesting just that. In a study published by this ultra-conservative institution, he advocated that the UN be purged of the "statist" and "socialist" strains which have "impregnated" its structures, that it should not attempt to assist states which require this assistance, and that it should renounce "utopian goals like eradicating poverty and providing medical care to all".


Boutros-Ghali's personality and management techniques, it is clear, are hardly the main issue. The US's prey certainly incurs, in a sense, the mission which the founders of the UN defined at a time when a certain political equilibrium was guaranteed by ideological and political pluralism. Post-Cold War America would like to take over the instrument of political power represented by the international organisation. Many UN member states, hardly insignificant members of the international community, have declared that they will support Boutros-Ghali's re-election, and this is no coincidence: western European countries (among them France and Germany), African nations (through the Organisation of African Unity), China, Russia, Japan and Canada have announced unanimously that their respect for Boutros-Ghali remains intact.

Is a clash within the Security Council in the works? If the disagreement persists, will the General Assembly be requested to arbitrate? According to the Charter, the GA has the right to impose the secretary-general of its choice. Jurisprudence permits it, since Trygve Lie was elected to this post in 1950 despite the Soviet veto. Everything depends on the determination of the parties — especially the members of the Security Council — not to give in to the US "diktat", and on Washington's desire to avoid a struggle which could damage both the US's prestige and the UN's credibility. A compromise is always possible — but at what price?

Translated from the French by Pascale Ghazaleh, and published, by special arrangement with the author, simultaneously with *Le Monde Diplomatique*.



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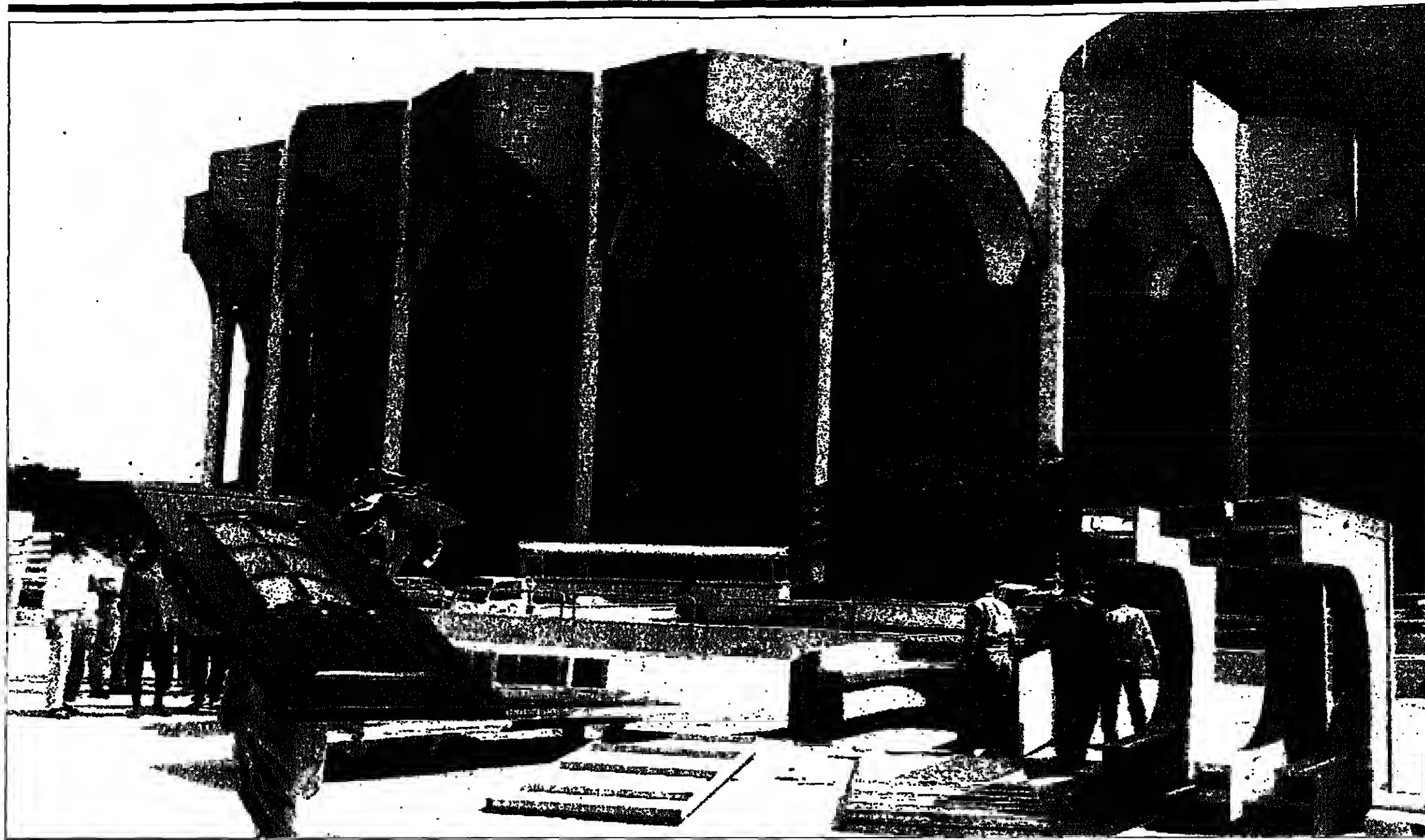
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MENA conferences I and II were held at euphoric times, when hopes for a new Middle East, in which peace and prosperity prevail, were running high. But from Qana to Netanyahu, these hopes have since dimmed. Meanwhile, economic reforms appear to be bearing fruit in several regional countries, and both governments and an increasingly influential class of entrepreneurs are eager to do business. How will the Cairo conference balance between these tendencies remains to be seen. On its eve, *Al-Ahram Weekly* reports on preparations, samples views, reviews backdrops and anticipates results



Last minute preparations at the Cairo International Conference Centre, where delegates to MENA III will hold meetings and make business deals

photo: Mohamed El-Qi

Businessmen's business

Weeks of planning for MENA III, say Foreign Ministry officials, will pay off — logistically speaking. The rest, however, is up to businessmen. **Doaa El-Bey** reports

With less than a week to go until the start of the Cairo Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference (MENA III), foreign ministry officials say that in organisational terms, the conference will be a success. The rest, however, is up to the businessmen.

According to Jihad Madi, director of the Foreign Ministry's International Conferences Department, representatives of some 90 states, 53 international and regional bodies, totalling roughly 3,000 officials and business delegates and a little over 1,000 businessmen, will attend MENA III.

"All the countries we [the ministry] invited to the conference accepted the invitation, and all the delegations are headed by either their country's ministers of trade, economy investment or, in some cases, foreign ministers," said Madi.

To cope with this deluge of delegates and businessmen, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry has been working overtime to ensure that their stay will be pleasant and productive. Experience gained from past conferences, he said, has been invaluable in preparing for this one.

"It is not a new phenomenon for

Egypt to organise such a large conference," stated the ministry official. "We have successfully organised the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 UN Crime Prevention Conference."

Logistically and organisationally, he noted, "We are positive that this conference will be a success." Madi explained that 60 per cent of the success of any conference depends mainly on its organisational aspect, not its substance. Many people, he stressed, judge an international conference or meeting by how well it is organised, how the delegates are received and welcomed from the moment of their arrival till their departure, and the facilities afforded them during their stay.

To that end, said Madi, the ministry has gone to great lengths to ensure that delegates find the arrival and registration procedures expedient and efficient. Moreover, the ministry has set up liaison offices in all the hotels where the delegates will stay in order to provide them with any help that may be needed.

However, preparing for such a con-

ference was no easy feat and, according to Madi, it required the help and cooperation of "all governmental departments, especially the foreign, interior and tourism ministries."

With the logistics taken care of, the rest, he said, is up to the businessmen. In this light, MENA III is a prime opportunity for Egyptian businessmen to establish a direct line of contact with their international counterparts.

"I think it is a very good opportunity to put Egypt on the international business map," stated Madi.

It is also a chance for Egyptian companies to present their projects to businessmen from around the globe. Egypt is presenting quite a number of major projects that are ready to be implemented. More important, they touch on all aspects of trade, economy, tourism throughout the country as a whole," he added.

It is on these points that the remaining 40 per cent of the conference's success will be determined. This, however, will only be determined after the conference is over and after the delegates have had time to discuss the projects in the meetings and workshops.

Networking for the future

MENA III's programme includes a host of events and opportunities aimed at drawing investors to the region. **Doaa El-Bey** reviews the MENA agenda

With the third Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA III) around the corner, conference organisers are anxious to ensure that the programme help participants realise the meeting's main objective, as stated by its slogan — "Building for the future: Creating an investor-friendly environment". To that end, organisers of the conference, which will be held in Cairo from 12-14 November, have put together a roster that seeks to paint a picture of the region as an excellent investment option and a strong competitor in the global economy. The programme designed for MENA III places a premium on interactive debates, and offers the nearly 3,000 businessmen, country delegates and institutional representatives scheduled to attend a maximum amount of time for networking and match-making.

Logistically, the programme is divided into plenary and thematic sessions, together with project presentations and industry workshops.

The plenary sessions will discuss the major themes of the conference, and will set the stage and provide the framework for thematic sessions and workshops. Among the broad topics up for discussion in the plenary sessions, over the three-day duration, are, "Peace and economic development", "Investment opportunities, potential

and changes" and "A vision for the future: the Middle East and North Africa in the next century".

The thematic sessions, project presentations and workshops will be held simultaneously in order to afford participants enough time to discuss the recommendations, proposals and outcomes, and to set the general framework needed for an improved regional investment climate. Participants are expected to discuss the most appropriate policies necessary to increase investment, commerce, trade and assist companies to better understand and predict the business environment in the region.

Some thematic sessions will focus on a particular country, such as the session entitled, "An in-depth examination of the Palestinian Economy". Other sessions tackle regional issues such as, "Peace, risk assessment and competitiveness: Business strategies of multinationals in the Middle East and North Africa", "Water" and "The Euro-Mediterranean partnership".

The industry workshops will coincide with the thematic sessions on the second and third days of the conference. They include special workshops dealing with the problems encountered by small and micro-enterprises when doing business as well as potential solutions. Also on the agenda are

sectoral workshops which focus on sector-specific issues such as agriculture, electronics, information technology and transportation. Both industry and sectoral workshops will allow participants to meet with officials and businessmen and to pursue new business and partnership opportunities.

The project presentations will allow different participating states like Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Morocco and Israel to present their projects. These sessions will also provide room for discussing the other regional projects already agreed upon during the Casablanca and Amman economic conferences, like the Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development in the Middle East and North Africa, South-east Mediterranean Economic Development and the Tabat-Eilat-Aqaba macro area (TEAM).

In addition to the formal sessions, the pre-organised match-making process and country lunches are designed to encourage participants to hold informal meetings. These lunches will be hosted by representatives of various countries of the region so that they may present their economic development priorities. The lunches are also an invaluable means of networking and informal contact-making between key decision-makers and business leaders.

Tours and security

Conference organisers and security officials are working overtime to ensure that MENA III is trouble-free, report **Jailan Malawi** and **Rehab Saad**

With some 3,000 delegates, businessmen and journalists, from over 80 countries, descending on Cairo to attend the third Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA III), Egypt's security apparatus, along with the conference organisers, are working around the clock to ensure that the only gripe businessmen and delegates will have will be among themselves as they hammer out deals.

"The Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC) is ready," said Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority and the CICC. "Along with the three main halls, another two are ready and are all equipped with audio/visual facilities and interpretation services for different languages. For the more than 1,200 journalists, telephones and faxes abound."

On the other hand, security precautions are extensive and comprehensive. "Work started months ago in the Interior Ministry and security preparations for the conference are air-tight," said Major General Mustafa Abdel-Qader, first assistant to the minister of interior. According to Abdel-Qader, the nation's security apparatus has a good deal of experience in preparing for such conferences.

"Over the past couple of years, Egypt has played host to over 200 international conferences that were held without a single security breach," he said.

He added, "Our success in securing previous conferences, in addition to Egypt's position as the cultural and economic centre of the Middle East, have encouraged numerous international forums to select Egypt as the base for their gatherings."

However, Abdel-Qader said that this conference is different from others held in Egypt since the movement of the delegates will not be limited to Cairo, but will extend to other parts of the country. As a result, there are special security precautions at Egyptian airports, ports and other points of entry throughout the country.

These preparations have gone hand-in-hand with others designed to promote Egypt as a golden tourist and investment opportunity. To that end, formal invitations have been extended to some delegates and businessmen to visit various tourist sites, as well as new communities and industrial cities. In addition, noted Abdel-Aziz, the Ministry of Tourism is going to hold a large exhibition on the sidelines of the conference to display Egyptian tourist items and to highlight tourism development projects in the country.

"Brochures of different Egyptian tourist destinations will be distributed to the participants, catering outlets will be available at the CICC and the Ministry will hold an Egyptian Night to entertain the guests and provide them with a taste of Egypt," Abdel-Aziz told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

But for such promotional efforts to be successful, safety and comfort are paramount. "Our aim is to encourage these businessmen to invest their money in Egypt, and this cannot be achieved unless security, which is the base for investment, is assured," Abdel-Qader said.

Security arrangements are tight in and around the Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC), where most of the meetings are to take place. To secure the per-

imetre of the CICC and routes leading to and from the conference centre, a large contingent of police will be deployed, "including uniformed and undercover forces," said Abdel-Qader. Their main objective will be to secure the safety of delegates while they are in the CICC and making trips around the city.

"We are preparing these trips for those who have time to take a quick look at Cairo's heritage," said Karim El-Menabawi of Emeco Tours, which is handling MENA III transportation and accommodation for the delegates. "We are also preparing a guide book which includes all the basic information about Egypt, including its economy and tourist sites."

In addition to security at the CICC, where searches and double searches are customary, all the hotels will be heavily guarded. In terms of behind-the-scenes security preparations, explained Abdel-Qader, the Ministry of Interior has obtained high-tech security equipment. "We are well equipped, and have at our disposal highly sophisticated closed circuit surveillance, monitoring cameras and telecommunication devices," he said.

Businessmen, however, are likely to be more impressed with the facilities available in their hotels. "Three executive floors at our hotel will be set aside and specially equipped for businessmen," said Nagwa Emad, director of public relations at Sonesta Hotels. "The hotel's business centre will be open 24 hours a day, and there will always be employees to provide general clerical and secretarial help."

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Time for business

Leading businessman Farid Khamis speaks to Gamal Nkrumah about Cairo's MENA III, which allows businessmen to run the show and makes politicians, for once, take the back seat



Mohamed Farid Khamis is not your average, run-of-the-mill Egyptian entrepreneur. He might not be spontaneous, but he is a straight talker. With *Al-Ahram Weekly's* marketing manager, Nagwa El-Akkad, and photographer, Sherif Sonbol, I went to see him a couple of weeks before the third Middle East-North Africa economic conference (MENA III) at his Nasser City headquarters. He seated us in a small parlor with plush office and sat us down in exceptionally comfortable chairs. He ordered us the customary cups of tea in an authoritative voice. His height and athletic build were imposing. Khamis' swarthy and handsome looks reinforced the charisma of the man of fifty-something. One was left without the slightest doubt that a dger, not a cipher, runs the show. Carpets were everywhere — sprawling abundantly all over the floor, hanging on the walls, even framed in spectacular photos and paintings. Khamis is a man who takes his work very seriously, and he obviously has an eye for the beautiful things in life.

With Farid Khamis you get the impression that business, like politics, is a sport. It is the terrain where hard decisions are made and he certainly conducts the game with aplomb. He is a member of the *Shura* Council, the chairman of the Federation of Egyptian Industries and an active member and former president of the 10th of Ramadan City Investors' Association, in addition to heading the Oriental Weavers Group.

No one really knows how far businessmen influence political direction in Egypt today. Does a Farid Khamis less or more make any difference? Well, according to the reasoning of the 1990s, it does. Khamis was certain that politicians should take the back seat and leave businessmen to run the show at MENA III. He is one of the major figures working behind the scenes to "make the Cairo conference a resounding success. Not even Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hostile antics and intransigence can stop the success of MENA III," he said.

In this part of the world, businessmen rarely grab the headlines. That Farid

Khamis describes himself as a man of industry, not a businessman, is telling. "I am an industrialist," he stated categorically. "The term businessman has negative connotations in Egypt," Khamis said. "Traditional popular imagination has it that businessmen have protruding bellies, have beautiful secretaries and make a lot of money by playing dirty tricks. In short, businessmen are supposed to be bloodsuckers. That is not a very positive image for the 1990s. But I believe there is a marked shift in popular thinking about business and businessmen in Egypt today. I believe the Egyptian public now listens to what businessmen have to say."

So who is Khamis? A grasping capitalist? He is by no means conservative; he is daring, he takes his chances, but you get the impression that he lives by the rule book. He runs around with the most important people in the country. "Everybody is in business to make money. There is nothing criminal about making money. The problem is when money is made by foul means," Khamis said. He has risen to the dizzy heights of fame and fortune, but he is still an *ibn balad*, roughly translated as a "son of the soil or the country." People who know him say so.

How will the Cairo conference differ from its predecessors in Casablanca and Amman? "Casablanca was a political marriage party for the Israelis, introducing the new bride to the Arabs. In Amman the bride and her relatives got to know her in-laws better. We as businessmen of the Middle East should get together and get to know each other better. The focus in Amman was on the macro level. The Cairo conference is the summit for business people. The focus in Cairo is going to be on the micro-level: businessmen getting together to talk business," Khamis said.

"Egypt is underrated. The relationship between Egypt and the United States is very good. But there is the need to better market Egyptian products in the US. We are working hard through different channels, such as the US-Egyptian Presidents'

Council, to market successfully Egyptian and Egyptian goods in America," he pointed out. "Our priority is to create a friendly business environment in Egypt. We are encouraged by the efforts of President Hosni Mubarak and the new government's approach to creating a climate conducive to business. The American side of the Presidents' Council is also helping to boost Egypt's image in the US. Ed Walker, the American ambassador, is making strenuous efforts to boost the image of Egypt in the US. He travelled to America three times this year in order to promote Egypt and Egyptian products over there," Khamis said. America is a natural market for Egyptian products, he emphasized.

What about Europe? Khamis was certain that Europe's motives for incorporating some of the North African and Middle Eastern countries into its economic orbit were not altruistic. "Europe is interested in us not simply because it wants to help us. Europe is interested in us primarily for advancing their own interests. They see the Mediterranean Sea as a European swimming pool. Whoever possesses the economic power also has the political power. The European interest in North Africa is similar in the American interest in Mexico. It is the interest of the US to have Mexico in the North American Free Trade Agreement. I do not see any contradiction in the European Union wanting to expand eastwards into the former communist states of Eastern and Central Europe on the one hand and its interest in the countries of the southern half of the Mediterranean Basin on the other. We, as Arab businessmen, value the partnership with Europe," Khamis stressed. "Europe and the Arab world have mutual interests."

What about business opportunities with Japan? "The Japanese are often slow to make radical moves. They have made it very clear on several occasions that their interests lie primarily with their immediate neighbours in East Asia. They say that at a later stage they may

consider expanding business with us in the Middle East. It is also important to note that the Japanese will want to get a signal from the US to proceed with expanding business with our region. Japanese businessmen will wait for clear indications that the region is peaceful before they move in to do business on a big scale here. The Japanese are a very organised and disciplined people," Khamis explained.

What about terrorism in Egypt? Is it not a problem that frightens away all but the most intrepid investor? Terrorism is a problem that puts people off doing business in this part of the world. However, Khamis was confident that terrorism is a problem that can be contained. He said, "There is no long-term place for terrorism in this country. Terrorism is imported from abroad, and gained strength in the past from the poverty and economic problems of the less developed part of the country — Upper Egypt. A purposeful today builds a prosperous tomorrow. President Mubarak hit the nail on the head when he launched a special effort, the Media Project for Upper Egypt's Development, to develop southern Egypt. The focus is on the creation of jobs and on encouraging investors, both local and foreign, to invest in Upper Egypt. The success of the Sharm El-Sheikh summit and Egypt's record of dealing severe blows to terrorism and stemming the tide of political violence is heartening."

What about the many detractors of MENA III? They dismiss the conference as a ruse to allow Israel to dominate the region economically. And what about the security problems that dog the region? "The Middle East peace process must succeed if the region is to develop economically," Khamis stressed. Is the Middle East peace process an unstoppable tide or a monotonous sari? There is only one way out of the mess created by Netanyahu: the softening of the Israeli position. And regional economic integration? His own criterion of success is managing to work under stressful circumstances, a measure he

also applies to the virtuous peace process.

Do issues such as rampant unemployment, poverty and terrorism not make for sobering reflection? "The problems facing the region are not insurmountable. We possess the ability to pull through. Indeed, we are over the worst," Khamis declared. Real politics is about making money. Real politics is about the struggle for power. Up to a point, his instincts are to smooth the rough edges. He has faith in the Arab-Israeli peace process and believes that Arabs can do business with Israelis. He is a man of many seasons. He was a Nasserist in the heady days of the 1960s. He was young and impetuous. Some of the passion lingers on — his vision is an Egyptian economy figuring prominently in the world arena. When? "Businessmen from around the world are coming to Cairo's MENA conference. Many business deals are going to be signed. None of this would have been possible a couple of decades ago," Khamis smiled. "Egypt has made important strides in the fight against bureaucracy and red tape, which hampered business opportunities in the past."

The relationship between politicians and the private sector's entrepreneurs has often been characterised by a mutual contempt they have had difficulty concealing. Now, more than at any other

time, there is a determined effort to heal the abrasions of the past — but not in gloss over the mistakes. For the first time in the post-revolutionary period, the private sector's leaders are permitted to encroach on a hitherto forbidden domain — directing the country's economy. But things could still be better. The relationship between government and the private sector is friendly, but it is certainly not a romance affair. Many businessmen, including Khamis, are pressing the government to liberalise the economy further. Some important legislation pertaining to investment and other aspects of business has recently been passed. It was a most welcome relief. If that legislation had been passed 25 years ago the political history of the last quarter of a century might have been very different. But Khamis is not one to dwell too much on the past.

Nasserists have long since lost power, but their influence is still considerable. Khamis feigned innocence when queried about the charge that he is, or at least was, a Nasserist of sorts. "Yes, we are all Nasserists," he said in a somewhat evasive manner. The Nasserists' mission to govern in everyone's interests — but more so those of the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised — is a cause dear to his heart. Nasser represented the interests of the whole nation. I had hardly thought it possible for someone as fervent a Nasserist as Khamis to be so clever at business.

Khamis wants to see the development of a genuine partnership approach to business between the government and the private sector. How important MENA III will be historically remains to be seen. Khamis is optimistic that it will enrich the region and those who come to do business here.

The importance of being regional

Politicians may control the regional climate, but it is businessmen who make regional economic cooperation and integration — an absolute necessity in today's world — a reality, writes Shafiq Gabr



Three global developments that have had far-reaching effects are yet to be fully understood in the business context in the Middle East.

The first is the demise of the Soviet Union, which contributed to the movement of global investments into Russia, CIS countries, Eastern Europe and China as never before, creating a strong competitive environment for capital movement.

The second is the remarkable communications revolution which is contributing to an acceleration in economic activity and a much more transparent world economy with technology and information crossing borders at an unsurpassed pace. In reality, this revolution is just beginning.

The third is the growth of regional economic blocs that have, as never before, begun to take a key role in world economies. The European Union, NAFTA, Mercosur and ASEAN are examples

of successful regional economic blocs that have contributed to growth of investment, greater inter-trade relations and economic betterment of the region as a whole.

These three global developments are having a substantial impact worldwide, both politically and economically. Here in the Middle East we have not paid enough attention to the economic and business requirements flowing from these developments.

The MENA economic conference offers the private sector in the region a superb opportunity for its voice to be heard. And it is a voice that must be heard because, while politicians may provide or at least influence the receptiveness of the economic environment, it is business which will make regional economic cooperation a reality.

At present only about six per cent of the region's trade is done within the region itself. This dis-

appointingly low level is a result of interference and hindrance by governments through, for example, trade protocols, tariff barriers and bureaucracy. The cold hand of government touches every importer, exporter and would-be investor throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Against such a barrier, it is something of a miracle that inter-regional trade has reached even these low levels. It is frequently easier to do business with countries thousands of miles away, where the obstacles are either fewer or smaller.

Many regional governments are working to liberalise economies and to create commercial and legal environments more conducive to private investment and regional trade, but at varying levels and differing speeds. With the encouragement of private businesses, the momentum towards change can increase.

The lack of a comprehensive

and just peace in the Middle East and recent delays by the Israeli government to fulfilling its previously agreed upon commitments also create a difficult environment for global and local investors who are looking for a stable and secure regional market for their capital and goods. A unified, long-term vision for economic growth among regional business communities can be a powerful force in encouraging governments to return to the path of peace already forged.

Egypt, of course, pioneered the peace process in the Middle East and remains the steadfast cornerstone of that process. This influences the perspective of the Egyptian business person which I would summarise as follows:

Regional economic cooperation is necessary to integrate from strength into the global economy.

A regional market is needed for multinationals to invest;

A comprehensive and just peace is a prerequisite for regional economic normalisation;

Continuous movement toward peace and the strengthening of the peace process is a necessary ingredient for greater economic and business links in the region; and

Egypt after its economic reform programme is ready to become the gateway for multinationals into the Middle East and Africa.

Countries with a common denominator of values, principles, interest and benefits can become the core of a true Middle East/North Africa regional bloc. Private business people in the region can and should lead the way.

Private business can reinforce both the process of peace and ensuring agreements through business initiatives to neighbouring countries, as well as at home —

which build on the strengths of each nation through trade and manufacturing partnerships. Investment can begin by upgrading existing facilities, improving product quality to meet international standards and developing the skills of employees that will improve efficiencies to meet the demands of a more competitive business environment. Collaboration to form regional institutions with the participation of private business to address resources, environment, disarmament and other

important issues can begin now. And, business can actively promote and invest in cultural, educational and internship exchange programmes that will increase understanding and acceptance by each nation's citizens of the benefits of regional cooperation.

The Cairo economic conference is a timely and appropriate venue for business to be heard and for cross-border and cross-continent relationships to be formed. The 2,000 plus senior-level government and private sector conference participants should not let this opportunity pass them by.

The writer is head of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt and chairman and managing director of the *Atroc Group for Investment and Development*.

Evolution of the MENA economy

Mohamed El-Erian, outlining the most critical developments of the economy of the Middle East and North Africa, argues that a virtuous cycle of reform and integration is the region's win-win option



Investment decisions are affected by developments in the macro-economy. After all, the macro-economy is an important determinant of the profitability of an investment. With a large number of investors from inside and outside the region attending the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) conference, it seems particularly appropriate to review the region's macro-economy — past, present and future.

The MENA economy is of significant importance in the world economy. It has substantial natural and human resource endowments, a large domestic market and a tradition of entrepreneurship and trade. Exploiting the region's substantial economic potential depends on the MENA countries' policies and developments in the international environment.

Economic policies in the recent past have not been strong enough to offset negative external factors. As a result, after registering relatively rapid growth in the 1970s and early 1980s, the region's national income stagnated. The region's per capita income level in 1995 was some four per cent below its level a decade earlier; this at a time when it rose by 40 per cent in developing countries as a whole and by 80 per cent in the more dynamic Asian economies. Consequently, unemployment levels in certain MENA countries have remained too high, compounding the challenge of finding jobs for the large number of new entrants into the labour force. The overall disappointing economic performance discouraged in-

flows of foreign capital and induced residents to hold a significant part of their capital outside the region.

The past has been by no means all negative. Progress has been made in reducing financial imbalances and reversing the explosive growth in external debt that had taken place earlier. Egypt is a good illustration of this. The budget deficit was reduced from over 20 per cent of GDP to 1.3 per cent in 1995/96, supported by prudent monetary policy. As a result, inflation declined to 7 per cent and the country's international reserves rose to the very comfortable equivalent of some 18 months of import cover. At the same time, aided by debt reduction, the country's stock of external debt fell from 75 per cent of GDP in June 1992 to under 30 per cent by June 1996.

With better economic policies and a more favourable external environment in 1996, several countries in the region are putting behind them their record of stagnant economic growth. The region as a whole is projected to grow at a rate of over four per cent, double that of last year. This will result in the first year of positive per capita income growth since 1992. Inflation continues to decline, projected to reach 12 per cent compared to an average of 17 per cent in 1993/94. The balance of payments performance is also improving, led by reductions in trade imbalances and a current account deficit projected at under two per cent of GDP in 1996, the lowest level recorded so far this

decade. As a result, foreign exchange reserves will strengthen.

Regional integration, however, has remained limited. The recent setbacks to the peace process have put on hold various regional infrastructure projects and undermined private sector interaction. At the same time, they have imposed tremendous pressures on certain economies, particularly the Palestinian one, where the frequent border closures have aggravated the already serious unemployment situation in the West Bank and Gaza and disrupted trade. It is critical that steps be taken to improve conditions in the Palestinian economy.

Looking forward, there is nothing automatic about sustaining the recent improvement in the economic and financial performance of the MENA region as a whole. As recognised by policy makers, it requires a continuous strengthening of policies. Economies need to consolidate their macro-economic stabilisation and deepen and widen structural reforms to improve efficiency, increase investment and enhance job creation. It is, therefore, appropriate that governments are pressing ahead with privatisation, deregulation and trade liberalisation. This will ensure the maintenance of a strong enabling environment, to be supported by strengthened institutions and information flows.

While the overall economic gains will outweigh the losses, the process of reform will, inevitably, involve important changes to the structure of the region's econ-

omies, causing dislocation to certain workers and producers. This underlines the importance of strengthening social safety nets to protect the most vulnerable groups of the population as well as enhancing training and improving basic social services.

If sustained, MENA's improved economic performance will result in greater integration into the world economy. Already we are witnessing increased interest on the part of foreign investors, accompanied by closer linkages between firms in MENA countries and industrial countries, as well as direct access by private sector MENA firms to the latter's equity and bond markets. This process needs to be maintained since it offers to the region the possibility of resources that supplement domestic savings in financing productive investments.

After accounting for only one per cent of equity flows from industrial to developing countries, flows of portfolio capital to the MENA region have picked up in recent months. There has been a dramatic increase in the setting up of equity mutual funds directed to the region both of the country and the regional variety. Private firms in Egypt and Lebanon have tapped directly into equity markets in industrial countries using Global Depository Receipts (GDRs). Tunisia has solidly established itself in the international bond markets, placing issues on the Euro and Samual markets — thereby diversifying its external financing approach in the context

of a prudent debt management policy. Higher portfolio investment inflows are being accompanied by larger direct foreign investment. Accordingly, the region is poised to go beyond the insufficient levels of 1/2 to 3/4 per cent of GDP witnessed in recent years. This is significant not only in terms of larger financing availability but also in terms of positive spill-overs through the transfer of technology and managerial techniques.

The increased foreign investor attention to MENA economies has triggered a rush of credit ratings by internationally recognised companies such as Moody's and Standard & Poor. These ratings, in turn, are supporting broader institutional investor interest in the region. Countries in the region compare relatively favourably with those in Africa, central and eastern Europe and Latin America. Some have obtained investment grade ratings (such as Israel, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tu-

nisia and the United Arab Emirates). Others are near investment grade ratings (eg Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Qatar) and are rated the same or higher than countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Turkey.

It is appropriate that the MENA countries, and especially Egypt as the host, will not only "showcase" their improved economic performance but will also stress that their countries are open for business, at the forthcoming conference. The region's ameliorating economic conditions and the increasingly enthusiastic investor response constitute the basis of a virtuous cycle. Sustaining the improvement of economic policy enhances the return of private sector investment in the region. At the same time, increased investor interest in the region means a broader range of financing sources to help fund the economies' productive investments and enhance the development process. It is clearly a win-win option.

The writer is deputy director of the Middle Eastern Department of the International Monetary Fund. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Fund.

Through Western eyes

Representatives from countries outside the region spoke to Niveen Wahish of their MENA III expectations

Many countries from outside the region will be represented at the third Middle East-North Africa economic conference (MENA III). Although observers note that enthusiasm about the Cairo conference is less than that felt before the two previous MENA gatherings in Casablanca and Amman, non-regional participants are hoping Egypt's business sector will make the conference a success despite the political tension in the region caused by the snagged peace process.

United States Ambassador to Cairo Edward Walker believes the conference is sure to be a success. He said that the political climate will certainly affect people's attitude towards the conference, but in the end, "the economic conference is a business conference, and it has the right ingredients to be a success." According to Walker, the most important outcome of MENA III will be the amount of investment secured from foreign sources.

The US will be represented at the conference by a 30-strong official delegation, headed by Secretary of State

Warren Christopher and accompanied by around 300 businessmen acting on behalf of about 120 US companies.

Walker said that the secretary of state is heading the team because he has a strong interest in seeing the prospects for economic development in the region grow. "It is a principal element of the peace process that economic prosperity prevails in this region," he stressed.

During his stay in Cairo, Christopher is expected to meet President Hosni Mubarak and a number of Egyptian government ministers to discuss first and foremost the peace process. Walker said he also expects Christopher to emphasise the importance of making the region more business-friendly so that significant foreign investment pours in and establishes a stable base for peace in the Middle East. "We see a link between development and peace. There is an important foundation that has to be built — economic well-being."

According to Walker, the conference will be the region's opportunity to attract the investment needed to bring

about prosperity and development. "I do not know of any conference that can attract 120 US corporations," he said, pointing out that Egyptians have the chance to showcase Egypt after the economic reforms of the past six months.

Walker commented that, since the conference's aim is regional integration, projects presented at MENA III do not necessarily have to involve Israel as one of the parties. However, he said, "because of its location, Israel tends to be in the middle of a lot of things. For example, you cannot exclude Israel from regional tourism."

Walker stressed that in order to attract investment into the region, Arab cooperation needed to be enhanced and impediments to trade between Arab countries had to be reduced. "Private companies which want to invest in Egypt want to see Egypt as a regional base for business," he said. "They want to have the population of the whole area as potential consumers."

Sounding similar views to Walker's, Michael Bell, the Canadian ambassador to Cairo, said: "Despite the uncertainty

occasioned by the political change in the region, we are fairly happy with the kind of response we have received from the Canadian private sector." He said that about 40 Canadian private sector companies, representing a wide range of activities, will attend MENA III. By comparison, 23 Canadian companies were represented in Amman and only eight went to Casablanca. "It is a sign that the companies are prepared to look at the region seriously," Bell said.

The Canadian delegation will be headed by the Canadian foreign minister. "This demonstrates the level of interest and our desire to become involved in the conference," Bell commented.

He said the Canadian government took great interest in the two previous MENA conferences and is now providing technical assistance to help with the organisation and promotion of the Cairo conference. "We are doing this because we believe in the importance of this conference and in the economic future of this area, especially the Egyptian market," Bell said.

The Canadian ambassador

said that what is required for projects to be realised is a more investment-friendly environment. Concerning Egypt, he said, "We are impressed beyond our expectations at the development which has come about since the advent of the Kamal El-Ganzouri government." However, he pointed out, "there are laws and regulations that date from an earlier time which challenge the imagination of potential investors. The ministers and officials recognise the problem and things are improving, but we would like to see them improve more."

Torben Holte, acting head of the European Commission's delegation to the conference, is optimistic about the event. The European Union is represented by a small official delegation, but this, according to Holte, is because their representation is mainly dependent on private sector participation. "The aim of the conference is to promote investment, and officials are there only to act as moderators," he said. Holte agreed with Bell that what is needed for improving the investment climate is quicker regulatory reforms.

Peace's meager harvest

After 17 years of cold peace, Egyptian-Israeli economic ties remain limited in scope

Ever since Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, becoming the first Arab country to do so, the newly-established relations between the two countries have been described as cool. Hopes that limited economic cooperation was poised for take-off received a big boost when the Palestine Liberation Organisation reached a self-rule agreement with Israel in 1993. These hopes, however, appeared to have been dashed when the implementation of the accord ground to a halt following Benjamin Netanyahu's rise to power in June.

Apart from agriculture, tourism and Egyptian oil exports to Israel, economic cooperation between the two countries has been limited. A number of joint ventures, most notably an oil refinery in Alexandria, were either decided or discussed at previous regional economic cooperation conferences in Casablanca and Amman.

According to Lior Ben-Dor, press attaché at the Israeli embassy in Cairo, Egyptian-Israeli trade which stood at \$16 million in 1981 rose to a modest \$77 million in 1995. But this is over and above Egyptian oil exports to Israel which range between \$200 and \$300 million annually.

Relations are governed by a trade protocol signed by the two countries in May 1980, providing for the application of most favoured nation conditions. The protocol also states that payments by the two countries should be in hard currency, each side should allow and facilitate for his counterpart the establishment of trade centres, participation in exhibitions and visits of commercial delegations; the creation of a joint committee to review the agreement, promote trade, ensure the flow of goods and commodities between the two countries and settle any problems that may arise.

As a result of Netanyahu's hardline policy and the stalemate in the peace process, some Egyptian businessmen have decided to stay away from the Cairo conference. "The Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce (EFCC) will not have any kind of commercial cooperation with Israel unless there is tangible progress in the peace process," said the EFCC's chairman Mahmoud El-Arabi. Many Israeli businessmen responded by deciding to boycott the conference as well, showing apprehension that Netanyahu's policy would have a negative impact on the attitude of their Arab counterparts. Only 50 businessmen representing Israeli governmental institutions and an equal number from the private sector are expected to show up for the Cairo gathering. They will float ideas for a number of projects in various sectors, including tourism and infrastructure.

The establishment of an export-oriented oil refinery in Alexandria at a cost of \$1 billion was decided at the Casablanca summit. The project, which will be completed in 1999, will provide 4,000 jobs to Egyptian workers.

The two countries have also been able to make good progress in agricultural cooperation, compared with slow advances in other economic sectors. The reason is that Egypt and Israel have similar weather conditions and vast reclaimable desert lands. Another reason is that Youssef Wali, deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture, is an enthusiastic advocate of bilateral cooperation. Last May, Wali sent a 180-member delegation of agricultural officials and businessmen to attend an international conference in Jerusalem and discuss agricultural relations with Israeli officials.

Although agricultural cooperation figures high on MENA's agenda, Abdel-Fattah Diab, an importer of machinery from Romania and Israel, expressed concern it might be affected negatively by Netanyahu's policies. "Egyptian businessmen, though open

to boosting economic relations with Israel, cannot ignore the negative impact of the new Israeli policies to the Palestinian territories on economic relations," Diab said.

According to Ibrahim Hussein, secretary-general of the Egyptian-US Presidents' Council, 14 projects have been proposed for Egyptian-Israeli agricultural cooperation. These are topped by a joint flower-growing venture. Pointing out that Israel exports as much as \$600 million worth of flowers annually, he said the Presidents' Council will probe with Israeli businessmen the possibility of establishing a number of flower nurseries in Egypt.

Egypt, Hussein said, can put up the land and cheap labour, with Israel providing the technology and taking charge of marketing. Hussein also said the Council's list of agricultural cooperation projects with Israel includes fertiliser production in El-Amariya, near Alexandria, the manufacture of tractors and irrigation equipment and the manufacture of wood from cotton stalks.

In terms of bilateral governmental cooperation, the ministry of agriculture has prepared a long list of joint agricultural projects. These include the reclamation of El-Qwaynat desert area, in south-western Egypt, at a cost of \$1 billion, building a \$20 million laboratory for agricultural genetic engineering, establishing a beet sugar-production farm in Fayyoun, and several fish and poultry projects in various provinces.

In the field of tourism, Israelis have shown great interest in visiting Egypt although few Egyptians care to go to Israel. According to official Egyptian figures, 49,066 Israelis visited Egypt last August, an increase of 12.9 per cent over August 1995. And during the period from January to August 1996, the number of Israeli visitors reached 226,805, an increase of 31.5 per cent over the same period last year. For Israeli tourists in 1995, Egypt was the second most favoured destination after Germany.

According to Ibrahimi El-Zayyat, chairman of Emeco tours, Israelis favour Egypt because of its historical sites and cheap prices. Many of them understand Arabic and some may have relatives in Egypt.

Egyptians, both Muslim and Christian, are eager to visit religious sites in Jerusalem, but are reluctant to do so as long as they are under Israeli occupation. Pope Shenouda III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, has banned Copts from visiting Jerusalem until the rights of the Palestinians are restored and until Deir El-Soltan, a monastery taken over by the Ethiopian church, is restored to the Coptic church.

One concrete manifestation of cooperation in the tourism sector was the signing of the charter of the East Mediterranean Tourist Association (EMTA), which included Egypt, Israel, Turkey and Cyprus. The Association was later expanded to include the Palestinian Authority, Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan and its name converted to the Middle East Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association (MEMTTA).

MEMTTA, however, has faced obstacles as a result of Netanyahu's policies. At a recent meeting in Tunis, Egypt and the Palestine Authority walked out in protest of his decision to open an archaeological tunnel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. As a result, the meeting was cancelled.

Subsequent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli troops to the self-rule and occupied territories also had a negative impact on tourism, with operators reporting cancellations of package tours combining Egypt and Israel.

Reported by Gamal Essam El-Din, Mona El-Fiqi and Rehab Saad



A reluctant participant

For the Arab League's secretary-general, MENA III will be an opportunity to reassert that real regional economic progress cannot be divorced from politics, reports Aziza Sami

After lengthy deliberations, Esmat Abdel-Meguid, the secretary-general of the Arab League, last week accepted an invitation to attend MENA III. Abdel-Meguid, who accepted the invitation after what a source close to him described as "an initial reluctance to do so", will head the League's delegation to the three-day economic conference in Cairo.

The source explained that until last week Abdel-Meguid, perturbed by recent setbacks to the Middle East peace process, had been in two minds about attending the conference. Another source of concern for the Arab League secretary-general was the absence of several Arab countries from the conference, notably Lebanon, Syria, Libya and Jordan, which will only field a business delegation. He stated that the decision to attend the conference, despite the fact that the League still formally upholds the long-standing Arab

economic boycott of Israel, is in line with "the League's policy ever since it attended the 1991 Middle East peace conference in Madrid and the ensuing economic conferences in Casablanca and in Amman."

Abdel-Meguid will attend only the first session of the conference on 12 November, then will fly to Rome to attend a meeting organised by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

In his opening speech, he will define the Arab position vis-à-vis several issues, most prominent of which will be the peace process which has been stalled since Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was elected to office last May. Abdel-Meguid will also call for Israel's adherence to the existing peace agreements, warn that the escalation brought about by recent Israeli actions in the Palestinian occupied territories will only result in a

new Intifada and reaffirm Arab Jerusalem's status as an occupied territory since 1967.

Other key topics to be addressed in the speech will be the League's position that economic and political normalisation between the Arabs and Israel, including the success of regional economic cooperation, are contingent on Israel's adherence to all existing peace agreements.

The League had exhibited flexibility over exceptions to the Arab economic boycott, in part as a de facto acceptance of economic cooperation between Israel and the Arab states which have signed peace agreements with Israel. The League had also accepted the lifting of the ban on some international companies that do business with Israel.

In response to reports that the League, through some of its member countries, would present a "plan of action" designed to veto any regional economic agreements which might be to Israel's undue advantage, Kamal Slama, deputy-director of the Arab League's Economic Affairs Department, which was only recently included in the League's delegation to MENA III, said that his department would present "no economic agenda whatsoever" to the conference.

Ibrahim Mohieddin, a member of Abdel-Meguid's office, said that since the League "is an organisation... which respects the sovereignty of Arab states and the divergence between the positions of different Arab countries with regard to Israel, the League will not present any agenda for economic action."

However, "given that politics and economics are two sides of the same coin, economic issues will be tackled in broad terms," he stated. "There can be no truly fruitful economic cooperation divorced from the political realities on the ground."

Tourism high on MENA agenda

Investment in tourism will be a major topic of discussion at the MENA III conference, reports Rehab Saad

Egypt is submitting three major tourism development projects at the Middle East-North Africa economic conference (MENA III). Two are meant for the country's northern coast, in the areas of Ras El-Hekma and Rosetta, while the third is destined for the area of Wadi El-Gemal on the Red Sea coast.

"All of these projects have been well researched. A detailed preliminary feasibility study has been prepared for them which includes... the state of the infrastructure, the location of attractions, expenses and job opportunities expected to be provided," said Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagi.

Wadi El-Gemal is one of the most promising areas which Egypt is going to highlight at MENA III. It lies 50km south of Marsa Alam and 150km north

of Bernice, covers an area of 1,300 feddans and has a 48km-long beach. The site is accessible by road and sea, but is still awaiting Egyptian and foreign investors. "The airport of Marsa Alam, which will be 100km north of Wadi El-Gemal and which is expected to be finished by the year 2000, will make the area even more accessible," said El-Beltagi, adding that the airport will be built by the private sector. Moreover, the military airport at Bernice is expected to be converted into an international civil aviation facility which could receive tourist groups.

According to officials, the area is one of outstanding natural beauty. It has natural bay areas rich in coral and marine life which would attract those interested in diving safaris and fishing. The surrounding deserts and mountains are

ideally suited to desert safaris and camel rides.

"Such areas attract European investors who are keen on eco-tourism," said Hossam El-Zomor of the Tourism Development Association (TDA).

"In that area we will propose the establishment of five- and four-star hotels, tourist villages, camping sites and two marinas at a cost of LE9.3 billion," said TDA head Adel Radi.

The Foka tourist centre in the Ras El-Hekma area overlooking the Mediterranean is another project with high potential. The site covers 598 feddans, lies 170km west of Alexandria and 75km east of Marsa Matruh, and has a 6km-long beach. Proposed development in that area includes 2,271 hotel rooms

and 9,299 resort village rooms at a cost of LE3.6 billion. "It is expected that tourism investments will increase in that area, especially after the decision to build an airport at El-Alamein," said El-Beltagi.

The Edko tourist centre in the Rosetta area will cover an area of 2,000 feddans. Three-, four- and five-star hotels, encompassing about 3,100 rooms in all, are due to be built there at a cost of LE1.5 billion. "Suggested tourism projects will include setting up areas for recreational beach activities and activity centres with swimming pools and sports fields... The area is rich in historical sites such as castles, towers, walls, mosques, hammams (public baths) and houses which date back to the Pharaonic, Islamic and Mameluke eras," said Radi.

Banking on investment

While Egyptian public sector banks are pinning their hopes on a successful conference, private sector banks are not so optimistic. Sherine Abdel-Razek reports

Ever since the first Middle East-North Africa (MENA) economic conference, held in Casablanca two years ago, the Egyptian banking sector has been instrumental in fuelling the regional cooperation engine. Public sector banks are preparing a long list of projects they plan to present at the conference. The call for the establishment of the Middle East Development Bank to finance regional cooperation projects was first mooted in Casablanca.

This year, Egyptian banks will be contributing by partially financing Cairo's MENA III as well as participating in its organisation. Ali Mahmoud Fayez, deputy managing director of the Federation of Egyptian Banks (FEB), pointed out that the federation has granted LE100,000 for Egypt's promotional campaign and contributed an additional LE80,000 towards the formation of the Private Sector Associations Committee, which is helping with preparations for the conference.

With almost all its members participating in MENA III, the FEB will be promoting 51 projects. The federation will also be transmitting information on its member banks via the Internet throughout the duration of the conference.

One of Egypt's four public banks and an active member of the FEB, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), has a list of 13 projects which it will present during the conference. Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, the NBE's chairman, said that his bank is seeking partners with which to invest in three existing industrial companies: Amisal for Salts and Minerals, Qena for Newsprint Production and the Arab Company for Steel. The NBE is also looking for partners which will assist in establishing projects in the sectors of agriculture and finance.

Another active participant at MENA III will be Banque Misr. Bahaaeddin Helmy, the bank's deputy chairman, pointed out that during the conference, Banque Misr will be offering a per-

centage of its holdings in 20 profitable companies for sale to both Arab and foreign investors. Information about these companies, whose activities cover construction, food and tourism, will be distributed during the conference.

Helmy emphasised the importance of economic regional cooperation to ease current tensions in Israeli-Arab relations. "Creating an environment of interrelated economic benefits will pressure the political authorities to accelerate the peace process," he said.

Despite the full agenda of public sector banks, private banks and brokerage companies have nothing concrete to present. Mahmoud Rashedi, general manager of the Egyptian-American Bank, said that his bank, for example, has no plans yet for the conference.

Ahmed Abdel-Wahab, vice-president of Concord International and the manager of several investment funds in Egypt, feels that this is a political rather than an economic event. "Concord's participa-

tion will be limited to attending and distributing company brochures," he said. "I do not consider MENA III an important conference in the business arena," Abdel-Wahab added. "This year has witnessed more important economic events, the last of which was the Economy Conference in Egypt."

Amr Hamed, managing director of Okaz Brokerage firm, claimed that she did not even know how to participate in the conference. "We were not invited and there is no published list of the foreign participants and thus we have not drawn any plans yet," she said.

Breaking from the pack, Adel El-Husseini, deputy chairman of Al-Rashad Brokerage company, considers the conference an excellent opportunity to strengthen business relationships between his company and regional as well as international counterparts. "We will exchange expertise and plans for further cooperation," he said.



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Business politics and political business

The Cairo conference promises to be more business-oriented than Casablanca and Amman. Nevine Khalil reviews the outcome of MENA I and II and the prospects for MENA III

Although the peace process appears to be sliding backwards, hopes still remain high that Middle Eastern economic cooperation will be forged, luring foreign investments and setting for a giant market of an estimated 200 million consumers from the Atlantic to the Gulf. The annual Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA) which began three years ago, shortly after the signing of the Oslo agreement, are viewed as the forum for gauging the prospects of this cooperation.

However, looking back at the outcome of past conferences in Casablanca, 1994, and Amman, 1995, it is clear that regional integration and cooperation is a target that is not close at hand.

From an Arab perspective, the achievement of a just, durable and comprehensive peace is a precondition for the integration of Israel into a Middle Eastern economic fold. A number of regional institutions and mechanisms were created in Casablanca and Amman but remain largely non-functional and only a handful of private sector deals were closed as a result of MENA gatherings.

Even before MENA I, Foreign Minister Amir Moussa, went on record as stating that official participation in Casablanca will be mainly to "negotiate and discuss" rather than closing specific regional projects. But he also emphasised that active Egyptian participation in the establishment of a new regional order is necessary to safeguard Egypt's interests. "We should not permit the role played by Egypt in the area to suffer a setback, especially with the expected flow of capital and investments in the region," Moussa said.

By serving as a forum for discussing regional economic cooperation, Casablanca gave the green light to businessmen, both Arabs and Israelis, to make contact with their counterparts. MENA I made no concrete economic achievements, but it vested regional cooperation with political legitimacy. The conference did witness multilateral negotiations for the establishment of regional financial and economic institutions, which were followed up and officially announced in Amman. These include the Middle East Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association (MEMTTA), the Middle East Development Bank (MEDB) and the Regional Business Council (RBC).

The most accomplished of these institutions is MEMTTA. With headquarters in Tunis, it only awaits the various parliaments of regional parties to ratify its charter. Progress has also been made in the Middle East Development Bank (MEDB), with a capital of \$5 billion, which is expected to begin operation by November 1997. After lengthy negotiations and discussions, the bank agreement was finalised and deposited in the United Nations on 28 August this year. It is now open for signature by the 19 founders as well as new members, including China which will be admitted at the first meeting of MEDB's task force.

Although preparations have been finalised for the transitional team working in Cairo to oversee the establishment of the bank, the US, which is the bank's shareholder, still has to secure the go-ahead from Congress. The US contribution amounts to 21 percent of the bank's capital, averaging \$52 million annually for five years.

The bank aims at attracting private funds that fled the region after finding no appropriate investment opportunities, as well as public funds from international financial institutions and donor countries. The US wants the bank to be a funding mechanism for the peace process, adding "an effective economic pillar of support for the historic achievements in the peace process." However, the EU, spearheaded by Britain, France and Germany, believes that there are sufficient funds being provided by institutions such as the World Bank and the European Investment Bank, and the more pressing need is for an agency that would manage funds coming into the region more efficiently.

Rafiq Saad, assistant foreign minister for regional cooperation and head of the Egyptian negotiating team, said last February, "it is not easy to establish a regional bank in the present circumstances. Each step must be carefully considered."

The most problematic institution has been the Regional Business Council (RBC) because its effectiveness is greatly influenced by political circumstances. Since the RBC was established by, and for, the private sector, with no government representation, it is up to the businessmen whether meetings are held or not. The RBC's steering committee has not met because Arab businessmen feel the time is still not right to fling the doors wide open before Israel. Also, the Palestinian private sector is unwilling to discuss the promotion of trade at a time when the movement of goods and labour in the Palestinian territories is at the mercy of Israel which has so far been very restrictive.

Nonetheless, an effective body which was created after Amman is the Regional Economic Development Working Group (REDWG), and it has met to address various trade, infrastructural and tourism issues. In REDWG, Egypt chairs the finance committee, Jordan the infrastructure, the Palestinian Authority tourism and Israel trade.

The Executive Secretariat for MENA conferences is another regional body proposed in Casablanca and established later in Amman. Working out of Morocco, this regional institution aims to promote public-private partnerships, contracts, data sharing and investment in the region. The Executive Secretariat has three priority programmes, namely regional investment promotion, scientific and technological exchange and business involvement. It also runs MENA-net, an information exchange programme on the Internet.

Most Arab participants in Casablanca had the strong impression that Israel was acting to open new markets for its products and exaggerating its technological capability. Even for cool-headed businessmen, it was difficult to overcome 50 years of hostility. Nonetheless, government officials and more than 1,000 businessmen from the Middle East, US and Europe emerged from Casablanca with a strong feeling that the conference was successful in laying down the foundations of economic cooperation in the Middle East.

Mohamed Shaik Gahr, who chaired the Egyptian businessmen's delegation in 1994, said that Casablanca was a necessary political step to provide the umbrella for working towards future MENAs.

MENA II in Amman was more sharply focused and, in comparison to Casablanca, projects were more realistic, needing only reasonable financing by the private sector. One of the most ambitious cross-border projects discussed in detail in the Jordanian capital was an electric power network linking the Tabala-Aqaba triangle. The electricity grid scheme connecting Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, may later include Turkey and some European countries.

Another large-scale project is mainly dependent on Egypt's ability to export natural gas to Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, and maybe also Turkey, via a pipeline network. Studies by consultancy firms are currently under way regarding these two projects, with implementation expected within three to four years. MENA conferences also paved the way for additional multilateral economic talks between senior government officials. Last February, Egyptian, Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli officials met in the Hague for "exploratory talks" on regional economic cooperation in the first ever publicised meeting at the ministerial level.

Additional reporting Hazem Kandouk

Inter-Arab or Middle Eastern cooperation?

With the peace effort stalemated on the eve of MENA III, Jordanian and Palestinian businessmen have only modest expectations. Sherine Bahaa and Rasha Saad report

The MENA conference-series, with the third episode scheduled for the coming week, appears to establish a direct link between trade and investment and dismantled political barriers. But unlike Casablanca and Amman, there is an attempt — that can hardly be called successful — to dissociate politics from the Cairo conference.

President Hosni Mubarak insisted that MENA III is a conference and not a summit, although the word "summit" is included in the conference's official name. And the level of representation of many participating countries has declined from heads of state and prime ministers to ministers of trade and business. "All were fragile attempts to shift away from politics but the climate of political instability will loom over the conference's discussions," said a diplomat, who asked that his name be withheld.

Casablanca, the first in the series, was described as the ice-breaker. It brought Arab and Israeli businessmen together in an attempt to assess the prospects of launching joint ventures that would serve regional, as well as national, interests.

In Amman, businessmen abandoned the euphoria of Casablanca and realised its limitations. But this summit provided a perfect opportunity to campaign for ending the Arab boycott of Israel. Capitalising on the assumption that peace must be sustained by concrete benefits, the importance of promoting regional cooperation and trade liberalisation was underlined.

As for Cairo, Arab businessmen believe that they are confronted with two options. The first is to use the conference as a forum for discussing projects that can attract the optimum financing from foreign investors. In other words, the conference should not serve as a tool for introducing major regional projects while an intransigent Likud government holds power in Israel.

The second option, according to Hamdi Tabar, head of the Jordanian Businessmen's Association, is for Arab businessmen to "sit, discuss and negotiate together the possibility of working collectively in Arab — and not regional — projects."

Tabar said that "it is not true" that non-regional parties would have reservations on backing inter-Arab cooperation which does not include Israel. "In the past, even before the start of the peace process, the Arab world was quite capable of attracting foreign investments," Tabar said. "It would be illogical to honour those who are placing obstacles in the way of peace, Israel, and make them our partners."

Tabar recalled that the idea of forging regional economic cooperation originated with the previous Israeli government of Shimon Peres. "But Bin-Yamin Netanyahu is not a conducive factor. His policies will not encourage investors to come to the region."

Tabar affirmed that the Jordanian private sector fully supported the peace process but said that "in the current situation, we do not see the need for launching economic cooperation with Israel."

Taleb Al-Rifai, head of the Jordanian institute for encouraging investments, disagreed with Tabar, declaring that the Cairo conference was not the proper forum for inter-Arab coordination. According to Al-Rifai, "this should be discussed in the Arab League."

Al-Rifai denied that the Jordanian government discouraged investors from participating in MENA III, insisting that the opposite was true. Jordanian ideas for the conference are divided into two categories. The first covers governmental projects for building up the Jordanian infrastructure, including energy, transport, tourism and water. The second comprises projects floated by the newly liberalised private sector, he said.

As for Palestinian businessmen, they believe that — given Netanyahu's reluctance to go ahead with implementing the Oslo agreements — their participation in the Cairo conference would be useless. Although the official position of the Palestinian Authority is to encourage participation, Palestinian businessmen did not share the same view.

Ibrahim Abdel-Hadi, head of the Union of Palestinian Investors, believes that the majority of Palestinian businessmen and investors will stay away from the conference. Declaring that Palestinians have not reaped the fruits of peace, Abdel-Hadi said that deteriorating conditions in the Palestinian territories are bound to hinder investments.

"If we go to the Cairo conference, we should explain to the participants that our conditions are deteriorating: we do not import or export, we suffer from constant closures, and we face restrictions in moving from one place to another. Who will agree to invest in such conditions?" Abdel-Hadi asked.

Under a shadow of doubt

Egyptian public and opposition figures have expressed very little faith in the success of the forthcoming economic conference, reports Omayma Abdel-Latif

Seventeen years of formal normalisation and two economic conferences have not wiped out the barriers between Egyptians and Israelis. Although slow progress has been made in some fields, cooperation with Israel remains anathema for many Egyptians. Moreover, there is growing concern among many Egyptian citizens, businessmen and opposition figures that the forthcoming Cairo Middle East-North Africa economic conference (MENA III) is being tailored to underscore Israel's regional hegemony.

The vast majority of those interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* are adamantly opposed to any kind of cooperation with Israel until all occupied Arab territories are restored to their rightful owners. Many voiced fears that the conference will work to Israel's advantage at the expense of its Arab neighbours.

"The thing about such conferences is that on the surface they represent attempts to create large multinational cooperative affiliations. But if you scratch below the surface you find deep-seated rivalries and historical animosity that cannot be wiped out with a stroke of a pen," said one businessman.

In the first convention of the Egyptian Movement to Combat Zionism and Boycott Israel, held on Saturday, most of the speakers strongly rejected MENA III, on the grounds that it seeks to "put Israel at the heart of the undertaking."

"What Israel is doing is transforming the land-for-peace trade-off into a 'land-for-market' one, whereby its withdrawal from occupied Arab land is made contingent on its inclusion in a regional economic grouping," said Fawzy Mansour, a prominent economist. The anger and disappointment voiced by the leftist Tawassut Party, the Nasserist Party and the Islamist-oriented Labour Party were expected since their platforms pledge strong opposition to normalisation with Israel.

"This conference is nothing but an American ploy to sell Israeli products on Egyptian land," Adel Hussein, deputy head of the Labour Party, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Cairo should not be the place for signing contracts and striking deals with the Israelis... we should not give the Israeli delegation a chance to promote itself in a conference held in Cairo," Hussein added.

"What the Americans are trying to promote is that though Israel has only a market of five million people, it still can play a pivotal role in the region," said Abdel-Aal El-Begoury, editor-in-chief of the leftist *Al-Ahali* newspaper. "They intentionally ignore the fact that without Israel there is still a potential market of 300 million people."

"Israel has no programme to attract foreign or Arab investors, and it is not likely that it would initiate such a programme because it is — by its very nature — a closed country that cannot easily open its borders to regional cooperation. What Israel wants is limited regional cooperation that would serve its direct interests. It wants funds, but it does not want Arab investors," he added.

Ibrahim El-Dessouqi Abaza, secretary-general of the World Party, lamented the fact that the Arabs and the Israelis are gathering to strike economic deals while the march towards peace is floundering. "It is very important to move forward with the economic process and business initiatives," he said. "But it is equally important to move ahead with the faltering peace process. There is no point in participating in a conference that discusses economic cooperation while the Israelis are beating the drums of war... The businessmen who make deals with Israeli companies are the government's men. The majority of businessmen and industrialists still harbour many reservations about cooperating with Israel."

According to the reports of Egypt's General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), business between the two countries has been moving at a snail's pace because Egyptians have not reacted positively to Israeli products. "Many traders fear importing Israeli goods since they know that the goods will rot on the shelves before they find a buyer," said a member of the federation.

For the past two years, there have been articles in the press, mainly in opposition papers, warning of an invasion of Egyptian markets by Israeli goods. "Some importers would resort to taking off the Israeli labels on the products to be able to sell them," said one trader.

"Some believed the government's slogans of a new Middle East and decided to look for job opportunities in Israel, but they soon found out that they were regarded as potential Israeli agents," the GFTU member said. The GFTU is boycotting MENA III, in compliance with a resolution adopted by Arab trade unions not to participate in any conferences with the "Zionists" before a comprehensive peace agreement is reached.

In a poll conducted by the *Weekly* last year, Egyptians were asked whether they would buy Israeli goods. Seventy-one per cent of the responses were "no" and 26 per cent were "yes"; only three per cent of those asked had no opinion on the subject. When asked whether they supported Israeli factories being built in Egypt if they had a positive effect on the Egyptian economy, 75 per cent said "no", only 20 per cent approved, while five per cent had no views on the matter.

Even among businessmen who are planning to attend the conference, anti-normalisation sentiments are running high as a result of the latest Israeli atrocities in the occupied territories.

"The fact that we are attending the conference does not mean that Egyptian businessmen will agree to each and every project proposed at the meeting," said one businessman. "In fact, we will stand against any project — irrespective of how profitable it is — that could conflict with our national interests."

On the other side of the coin, some businessmen think MENA III will offer Egyptians a chance to meet their Arab and European counterparts. "This conference is not only about the Israelis and the Arabs. There are many Arab and European delegates coming," said Thab El-Shafie'i, an Egyptian businessman.

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Iraq, Iran stymied by mutual distrust

Could the two 'rogue' states of the Gulf become friends? Rasha Saad investigates

The announcement by Robert Pelletreau, assistant US secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, early last week, that Washington would like to hold talks with Iran on bilateral differences has left many observers wondering whether this marks the beginning of a new American policy towards Iran.

The Iranian response to Pelletreau's proposal, however, dispelled any doubts regarding the possibility of a rapprochement between the two countries. Last Wednesday, the Iranian state television quoted Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's spiritual leader, as saying that the proposal "is an old tactic to increase pressure" on Iran. Khamenei added: "The fight against America is a religious duty and our eternal slogan."

A few days after Khamenei's statements, The AP reported that a crowd of about 10,000 Iranian men, women and children marched to the former US Embassy in downtown Tehran, burning American flags and chanting: "Death to America." The march marked the 16th anniversary of the seizure of the American Embassy on November 3, 1979. On that date radical students stormed the embassy and took its staff hostage for 444 days. "This was the best of spies where the Americans hatched their plots against our nation," Parliament Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri told the rally outside the former embassy on Sunday.

But propaganda for local consumption aside, does the American expression of dissatisfaction with the deadlock between Tehran and Washington really represent a departure from the previously held American tough-line stance vis-à-vis Iran? Analysts do not see this move as completely contradicting America's proclaimed policy of dual containment of Iran and Iraq. While encouraging differences between the two countries serves this policy, "the US will find it difficult to contain the two countries at the same time. Eventually it will increase its pressure on one and decrease it on the other in order to prevent any tactical

alliance between the two," Mansour Alwazi, an Iranian analyst, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Thus the main issue is how to play one regime against the other. This immediately begs the question of the likelihood of the two inimical regimes burying some of their differences and joining forces in confronting the common enemy which brands them both as "rogue" states.

Last month, a special Iraqi envoy met President Rafsanjani and delivered a message from Saddam Hussein. Both sides discussed vital issues such as the prisoners of the first Gulf War (1980-1988), trade exchange, Iranians visiting Islamic religious sites in Iraq and the return of the Iraqi planes that sought safety in Tehran during the 1991 second Gulf War. The POW issue has been always a thorny one for the two countries, triggering countless disputes. While Iran alleges that there are thousands of Iranian POWs in Iraq, Iraq completely denies these claims.

The Iraqi initiative coincided with Iraqi accusations of Iranian support of one of the Kurdish factions on Iraq's soil, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), against its rival the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). In late July, Iran joined the fray in northern Iraq. Some 2,000 Revolutionary Guards attacked the base of Iranian Kurdish militants hostile to the clerics of Tehran, 50 miles inside Iraq. The KDP has accused Iran's Revolutionary Guards of using this incursion to support the PUK in its drive to recapture the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan it lost to the KDP in September. Moreover, Iraq has objected to the UN that the Iranian action represents a violation of the cease-fire agreement and of Iraqi territorial integrity.

The recent attempt at rapprochement took place immediately after the Iranian president told a German magazine that Iraq prevents the region from enjoying peace and that Saddam's regime is a threat to the Middle East. Both sides have attempted to improve their bilateral relations several times during

the last four years without great success.

Fahmi Howaidi, an Egyptian political analyst with special interest in Iranian affairs, believes that Iraq and Iran use each other as bargaining chips to further their national interests. He also believes that rapprochement between the two countries is difficult given their history of eight years of bloody war. "The improvement of the relationship between the two countries is not restricted to the presence of a positive will on both sides; it extends to encompass the influence of other parties. If Iraq felt that improved relations with Iran would hamper the lifting of the sanctions, it would not improve relations," Howaidi added.

Alwazi said that Iranian-Iraqi relations are a complicated matter that has witnessed many ebbs and flows since the end of the first Gulf War (1980-1988). He explained that even though both sides now have a common interest in confronting the US policy of dual containment, they have long-standing differences which make even the best of intentions.

Lack of confidence between the two countries is the major obstacle. Each country accuses the other of hostile moves contradicting earlier friendly statements and of only seeking to protect its own national interests. Iraq claims that whenever Iran feels the brunt of international isolation and faces political and economic pressures, it hints at cooperation with Iraq. Iran, on the other hand, accuses Iraq of using relations with Iran "to achieve political gains from the West."

More importantly, the ideological differences be-



Iranian women carrying pictures of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, left, and President Rafsanjani, right, while demonstrating in front of the former US Embassy in Tehran earlier last week (photo AP)

tween the two countries and the existence of Iraqi opposition forces in Iran and vice-versa make any rapprochement far from simple. According to Alwazi, Iran hosts a number of Iraqi opposition groups, including the Shi'ite Higher Council of Islamic Revolution, while providing support for some Iraqi Kurdish organisations such as the PUK. On the other hand, Iraq provides military bases for the Iranian Mujahideen Khalq opposition group, as well as support for a group called Arabistan Liberation Front. Alwazi said Arabistan is the name some people give to the region lying in the south-west of Iran, which encompasses more than four million Arabs and about 90 per cent of Iranian oil. It is the region the Iranians call Khuzestan.

Complicated disputes between the two countries

notwithstanding, they share certain common grounds. They both oppose the US presence and policy in the Gulf region; both are at loggerheads with the rest of the Gulf countries; and both are opposed to the current Middle East peace process. To this Alwazi added: "Iraq and Iran want to contain Turkish involvement in the Gulf in general, and in northern Iraq in particular. They are both opposed to an independent Kurdish state and they both see an advantage in coordinating their positions inside the OPEC organisation."

Howaidi believes that Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia are the three lions of the Gulf. If they could affect a reconciliation, it would change the balance of power in the area and would dramatically reflect on US policy in the Gulf region.

Algeria's main political parties have finally expressed strong reservations about President Zeroual's suggested constitutional reforms on the grounds that they would lead to their being banned. Amira Howaidi reports

Question of consensus

Thousands of flags and decorations adorned the streets of the Algerian republic last week to commemorate the revolution's 42nd anniversary. Not only does the anniversary coincide with an intensifying wave of violence, but also with major constitutional reforms orchestrated by President Liamine Zeroual.

The controversial amendments, variously described as "radical" and paving the way for "a new constitution," have divided Algerian public opinion. Reactions varied according to the diverse stands of the major political parties in response to the proposed reforms. The final text of the new draft constitution, which will be subject to a public referendum on November 28, was published last week in the Algerian press together with a presidential "explanatory" memo. According to this memo, the aim of the amendments is "guaranteeing the right to establish political parties."

But Article 42 stipulates that "it is prohibited to establish political parties based on religious, linguistic, ethnic or professional factors." The new constitution also prohibits the exploitation of Algeria's Arab, Islamic or Amazigh (Berber) iden-

tity in partisan propaganda.

The amendments are viewed as a de facto ban on Islamist parties and will also force approximately 18 currently legal parties to change their founding principles within one year in order not to run foul of the new constitution. The parties affected include the strong Front for Socialist Forces (FFS) and the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) in addition to the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), as well as El-Nahda, Hamas and El-Tajdid which also are Islamically oriented.

Last Monday, the Berber FFS issued a statement denouncing Zeroual's insistence on introducing constitutional amendments "at a time marked by the intensification of various acts of violence." The amendments, said the statement, only enhance "dictatorship under the umbrella of false democracy" and the party urges "all citizens to disregard their fear and give a massive no vote in the referendum." RCD's Said Saadi took a more radical stance. "All the nationalist and democratic movements should combat the government's plot as he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. To Saadi, the recognition of the Algerian

identity as an Islamic identity "will pave the way for the establishment of an Islamic state."

Both El-Nahda and Hamas have yet to issue an official statement, preferring to maintain the discreet silence they adopted since Zeroual proposed the amendments. However, El-Nahda's secretary-general Abdallah Gaballah told the *Weekly* that his party has "strong reservations about the amendments which we view as a radical setback from the multi-democratic system established by the '89 constitution." Articles 120, 123 and 124 of the new constitution threaten the democratic principle of the separation of powers since they give the president the right to issue laws and appoint an entire *Umma* Council alongside the existing National Council (parliament), said Gaballah.

Although Zeroual has not achieved either national reconciliation or "political stability" as promised in his December '95 electoral campaign, his plans do not seem threatened by real opposition. He is backed by the National Liberation Front which was the first to issue a statement "fully supporting" the amendments and urging its followers to go for a "yes" vote in the referendum. To many this was not surprising. The party's newly elected chairman, Bou Allam Ben Hammoud, already had announced his party's withdrawal from the opposition camp and the "Rome Group" which was led by his

predecessor Abdel-Hamid Mehri.

The FLN and five opposition parties met in January last year in Rome and issued "The National Charter" calling for a return to the constitution, the non-interference of the army in political affairs and the abrogation of the decision to ban the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). In addition, it demanded the release of all imprisoned FIS members and the recognition of the Algerian identity as Arab, Islamic and Amazigh. The charter was severely attacked by the government and gradually its signatories, namely representatives of the FLN, FIS, FFS, RCD, the Movement for Democracy in Algeria (MDA) and Nahda parties, became embroiled in internal conflicts. After boycotting some of the national dialogue talks, the RCD's leader Said Saadi decided to contest the presidential elections while the remaining Rome conference parties refrained from participating. The group has not met since then.

Backed by the army's hard-liners and the new pro-government leadership of Algeria's powerful FLN, Zeroual hopes to hold the referendum and win. The referendum will be followed by parliamentary elections in the first half of '97 in a bid to put an end to the five-year-old armed conflict triggered by the cancellation of the second round of the '91 parliamentary elections which the Islamic Salvation Front was poised to win. Between 60,000 and 70,000 people are estimated to have died since then.

Observers, however, do not count heavily on the success of Zeroual's referendum. Not only do the amendments to the constitution encourage the return to the pre-'89 one-party system, but they also open

the way to further legal and constitutional violations. The new constitution stipulates the establishment of an appointed *Umma* Council, alongside the existing National Popular Council (NPC), and it gives the elected president the authority to issue laws and special decrees without the approval of the parliament.

According to former house speaker Abdel-Aziz Belkhadem, Article 163 of the '89 constitution stipulates that any revision of the constitution has to be approved by the elected national council, "which we do not have since the 1991 crisis."

After the Algerian army intervened in the '91 elections, emergency law was enforced and a transitional national council was appointed temporarily by the army generals. In '94, then-Defense Minister Zeroual was appointed president of the country after he concluded a set of unofficial talks with the banned FIS. Another series of bilateral and multilateral "national dialogue" talks followed without making further progress as they gradually excluded the FIS while keeping the major political parties involved.

The situation in Algeria now, says Belkhadem, is not very different from the situation before last December's presidential elections. The FIS is totally excluded. The FFS and MDA are dissatisfied with Zeroual's military rule. The Islamic-oriented Nahda and Hamas represent only mild opposition and the FLN supports Zeroual while the RCD "is objecting just to gain more political ground." Under such circumstances, he said, "real solutions are not even considered."

New settlements

Israeli Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon plans to build two Jewish cities to the West Bank that would bring 100,000 more settlers to the disputed land, as his spokesman declared on Monday.

The project, which has not been yet approved by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, would expand existing settlements and eventually merge them. Palestinian legislator Haider

Abdel-Shafi was quoted by the Associated Press describing the move as a call to war and warned that the Palestinians will not stand by as Israel settled their lands.

In another development, Jewish settlers tore down a steel platform and stairs before Israeli soldiers could finish building a room to be used for Israeli-PLO coordination unit after Israeli pulls out of Hebron. Witnesses said on Monday some

50 Jewish settlers were protesting at the building of the room on Al-Shuhada (martyrs) road linking two Jewish enclaves in Hebron's old city. They cursed passing Arabs and read from holy writings.

Witnesses said Israeli soldiers and policemen did not try to stop the settlers. The Israeli army said it was checking the report.

A PLO security official in the Hebron area, Brigadier-

General Abdel-Fattah Al-Jeidi, said the room would serve as a branch of the joint Israeli-PLO District Coordination Office (DCO) in the heart of Hebron after Israeli troops evacuate about 80 percent of the city. "The building of this DCO branch is in line with the 1995 Hebron deal. It will only operate after an accord on mechanisms of implementing that deal is reached," he told Reuters.

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Mohamed Samir Halaoui, president of Misir Travel



Ali Ghoneim, general manager and member of the board of Al-Ahram and head of AMAC Centre, speaking with Mr Shaumburg, managing director of the German Exhibition Organisation; Mr Schneider, executive manager of the United Association for Data Processing and Office Supplies and Mona El-Mahdi, representative of Hannover Exhibitions, during their visit to Al-Ahram on 28 October 1996. The purpose of the delegation's visit was to attend a conference organised by the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce which discussed preparations for the computer exhibition organised by Al-Ahram Establishment to be held at the Cairo Sheraton, as well as the CEBIT 1997 computer exhibition to be held in Hannover, Germany from 13-19 March 1997.

مكتبة من الأصل

Egypt is the issue

By Gamal Abdel-Nasser

The military operations that began in Sinai on the evening of 29 October have a small prelude which I would like to share with the reader. It was a small prelude, a political prelude that took place at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City, in early October — the same month that was later to witness the military operations in Sinai.

In October, the Security Council debated the question of the Suez Canal, concluding by adopting six principles towards a peaceful settlement of the issue, and on the basis of which negotiations would be conducted, while guaranteeing free and efficient passage through the Canal.

During and following the Security Council sessions, several meetings took place between UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, Dr Mahmoud Fawzi, the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs and his British and French counterparts, Selwyn Lloyd and Christian Pissard. While these were not the negotiations called for by the Security Council, they were without a doubt the kind of exploratory contacts that by necessity precede any negotiations.

The New York meetings concluded by reaching agreement on certain points, and with the participants agreeing to meet again soon for further discussion of the issues, the time and place of the next meeting to be arranged by Mr Hammarskjöld.

A few days later, the UN secretary-general sent the Egyptian government a projected location and date for the upcoming meeting.

The location was Geneva.

The date was Monday, 29 October.

Upon receiving his message, the Egyptian government immediately notified the secretary-general that it would attend the proposed meeting, whereas the British and French governments stalled. Then news came from London and Paris indicating that the matter involved more than playing for time. It soon became evident that London and Paris were attempting to find excuses to evade the scheduled date. The British and French governments had evidently scheduled a different meeting for 29 October. It was to convene in the Sinai Desert — not in Geneva — and they did not intend to meet with Egypt, but with Israel.

The aim was not to solve the problem of the Suez Canal. Rather, the new tripartite meeting aimed to annihilate Egypt — totally.

This is the truth which the parties to the tripartite conspiracy cannot deny. The issue was not about a canal that crosses Egypt. It was about Egypt — with all that it represents today, with all that it seeks and stands for.

Beyond Suez,

The issue is about a country striving for independence. The issue is about a country striving for power. The issue is about a country breaking the arms boycott. The issue is about a country aspiring to freedom for itself and others.

The issue is about a country wanting to liberate its economy.

The issue is about Arab nationalism, an ideology which has engulfed our entire region.

Imperialism could not let this happen.

(Extract from an article by Gamal Abdel-Nasser published in Akher Sa' a weekly magazine on 5 December 1956)



Nasser, thronged by crowds chanting 'we will fight', after giving a speech at Al-Azhar Mosque on 2 November '56

A moment of revelation

"The truth about Suez was always available but for many years it was ignored, hidden, obscured. It is gratifying, perhaps, that now, 40 years later, this truth is vigorously re-asserting itself. Possibly the most significant expression of this 'rediscovery of Suez' lies in what we might term the rehabilitation of the Egyptian people."

"For many years now Egyptians have been told that their recent history is one of continuous defeat and humiliation. That Egypt's national struggle was an exercise in futility and its challenging of imperialist domination 'nothing but reckless folly'. But everything that is being said about Suez today, the testimonies and documents that are being released, tells a very different story — a story of human triumph. We have been in four major confrontations with Israel, in '48, when we were defeated; in '56, when we were the victors; in '67, defeated; and finally in '73, when again we realised a victory."

"Every war has spoils, a prize that goes to the victor. In '56 the prize was nothing less than the Suez Canal. And where did you find that prize once the dust of battle had settled? Solidly in Egyptian hands."

"The truth was there. The collision between Britain, France and Israel is well known. Today, however, 40 years later, the Sèvres Protocol documenting the conspiracy is at last receiving widespread attention. The English copy of the document Lloyd, acting upon Eden's orders, shredded with his own hands. The French destroyed their copy. Only the Israelis preserved a copy of the protocol, among the personal papers of Ben Gurion held in the archives of the university named after him."

"The revelations and the testimonies all point to the truth of Suez, which has at last been laid bare. And that truth tells the Egyptian people one thing — yes, you were the victors. Yes, the political triumph of Suez was yours, and no, this political victory was not accompanied by a military defeat. This last point, an increasingly glaring truth, needs to be stressed, given the propensity of some Egyptian writers to endlessly list and bemoan their country's defeats. Such writers continue to insist that Suez was a political victory and a military defeat when in fact there was no such defeat. And this the Egyptian people now know. They know that the real threat was not in Sinai, but along the Suez Canal. They know that the order to withdraw from Sinai, leaving just six battalions (some 5,000 men) to provide cover for the withdrawal, was a tactical manoeuvre. These six battalions were ordered to hold their positions and resist the Israeli advance for 48 hours so as to enable the rest of the army to make an orderly withdrawal, which they did."

"There is no question of a military defeat. On the contrary, lines of defence were bolstered for a battle that had yet to begin. Anyone can make a paratrooper drop. But what next? As revealed by Louis Mountbatten the allied forces would have had to occupy the whole of Egypt to wrest a military victory, which was impossible."

"That the Egyptian people scored a full political triumph is beyond doubt. That they were not defeated militarily is no less clear. That the real battle did not start until many years later has been denied to them. And those who deny this triumph with the most energy do so in the belief that they are taking the victory away from Nasser. But it was Nasser

Loaded with meaning, Suez is being reappropriated by the Egyptian people, 40 years after they nationalised the Canal and fought to defend it. Mohamed Hassanein Heikal talks to Hosny Guindy of Suez in '96



who made the victory, it was the Egyptian people, with Nasser at their head. I am deeply gratified that after 40 years the truth about Suez is at last emerging, restoring to our people their real heritage, their right to dignity and self-confidence, rights that many have sought to deny."

"Moreover, it has now become abundantly clear that Suez was a turning point in world history. Look, for instance, at the Soviet ultimatum. It may be, and I stress may be — the issue has not been settled — that the Soviet ultimatum was not as decisive as was thought at the time. But the value of any political action lies in the effects it has at the time. So even if the Soviets were bluffing, the Israelis took them seriously and so did the British and the Americans etc. So in historical terms Suez, and not the Cuban missile crisis, was the first global confrontation in which the threat of using nuclear weapons was used. In this sense Suez was the first test of the global nuclear balance, while the Cuban missile crisis can be described as its full dress rehearsal."

"Look at the post-Suez world. The European states, especially Britain and France, were forced to adopt a new logic. Post-Suez, the declining imperialist states were forced into the realisation that their power was limited and that, outside the American umbrella, they

could do very little. In Britain, confidence in the Conservative Party was gradually eroded while in France, the Fourth Republic fell, and de Gaulle came to power. A whole new configuration of global forces was born."

"In this context, three very important ramifications of Suez should be noted. The first was its effect on Third World liberation movements; the second concerns its Arab regional consequences, while the third is connected to the way it helped to dramatically reorient the conduct of the Cold War, and in particular American strategy towards the Soviet Union."

"In a single blow, Suez — the triumph of the Egyptian people in Suez — freed the Third World of what we may call the Mossadegh syndrome. Mossadegh had challenged Western hegemony over Iran and was defeated, and his defeat had intensified the Third World's sense of inadequacy in coming to grips with Western domination. I remember Castro telling me once: 'There we were in the mountains dreaming of revolution. And all of a sudden we saw you nationalising the Suez Canal, we saw you fighting and winning. We could only tell ourselves 'if the Egyptians have been able to face up to the Israelis, the Americans, the British and the French and win, how can we not defeat Batista.'"

"The profound manner in which Suez affected the Third World is almost beyond imagining, and it makes me angry when I hear some Egyptians describing it as a defeat, for in doing so they damage not only this moment of our history but a whole range of meanings and values. There are intangibles in the struggles of peoples and nations, intangibles but nonetheless capable of great achievements. Human beings have imagination and spirit, they possess vision, attributes capable of transforming dreams into reality. Be as pragmatic and practical as you want, but you ignore such intangibles at your peril."

Second, the experience of Suez — with the destruction of the oil Tap Line in Syria — also contained the important lesson that Arab unity was not only a prerequisite for development but a key factor in safeguarding national security, giving impetus to the merger between Syria and Egypt the following year. And the very fact that the Suez war was a people's war, a struggle in which Arab peoples participated en masse, begged many questions concerning social justice. Before Suez, Egyptians spoke of Egyptianising foreign interests, after Suez the term nationalisation entered the vocabulary. Issues of social justice came increasingly to dominate the political agenda of states in the region. Saudi Arabia was

to abolish slavery a few months after Suez. A new era was dawning, an era in which the deprived began to question their social positions."

"Let us now ponder the third, less direct but no less dramatic, ramification of Suez on the world order. Eisenhower's post-Suez attempt to re-establish Western dominance in the region was defeated by the very reverberations of Suez. With Kennedy, whose advisers had closely studied the lessons of Suez, a new orientation in the confrontation with the Soviet Union began to take shape, reinforced by the Cuban missile crisis."

The Soviet ultimatum during Suez introduced a totally new element — the use of the threat of nuclear confrontation — into the global power game. The Americans began speaking of 'forcing the Soviet Union to change its priorities'. The minutes of meetings of the National Security Council during the Kennedy administration are constantly punctuated with the phrase 'forcing the Soviet Union to change its priorities.'

"Until that time, the Soviet Union had been trying to balance its military programme and its economic and social development, improving the standard of living and services available to its people in accordance with its vision of a communist society. But from the moment Kennedy took office, and even during his electoral campaign, he issued warnings about the supposed nuclear gap existing between the US and the Soviets. The idea was to force the Soviet Union to change its priorities, to force it into a futile arms race, and make winning this race its top priority."

"This strategy, adopted and pursued by all American administrations since Kennedy, reached its peak with Reagan's Star Wars programme, with the result that the Soviet Union expended massive resources and energy on the arms race to the detriment of almost everything else."

"Generally there are two types of international crises. One that stops short of war, like the Berlin Wall crisis, and another, like Vietnam, that is settled by war. Suez, however, was unique in that it was a moment of revelation, one which obliged all international and regional actors to rethink and to reassess their positions and the means by which they should continue with the global power game."

It could only happen here

"The personal recollections of the Suez days are dominated by the day of the nationalisation, events which I recount in *Cutting the Lion's Tail*. Of the war days, one particularly vivid memory comes to mind. It was on 30 October, the day the British French ultimatum was issued. In response all British and French subjects living in Egypt were placed under segregation. Among them was the famous British Orientalist scholar Archibald Huxford. He was nearly 80, and was living in Giza, in old Cairo. A specialist in Islamic architecture and art, he had bundles of documents, papers and drawings which if segregated would fall to the hands of the British. With little appreciation for their value."

"I got to know of this through Raymond-Hare, the American ambassador in Cairo, who telephoned me and suggested that these papers should be held at the American Embassy. I told him that this was impossible. He then suggested the American University in Cairo. I replied that this was a reasonable idea. I also agreed to Hare's suggestion that I meet with Cresswell myself and listen to his story directly."

"I arranged an appointment with Cresswell for 6 pm on 31 October. A short, elderly man, no sooner had he entered my office than an air raid alarm was heard. It was the first raid on Cairo airport. Immediately, the phone rang. It was Nasser, who told me that this raid was conducted by British planes. He then asked if there was anyone in the office. I told him about Cresswell and why he was there. Nasser agreed to the AUC idea immediately. 'You're right, these are important documents and should be protected', he told me, asking me to call him back once I was through with Cresswell."

"Turning to Cresswell, who had guessed already that it had been Nasser on the phone, I told him that Nasser had given the go-ahead for his papers to be held at the AUC, and that he was to go to Finance Minister Abdel-Monem El-Mohamed to facilitate the safe transport of the papers. Tears began to appear in Cresswell's eyes. 'This could only happen in Egypt', he said. 'That at this time and under these conditions Nasser should take time to listen to the story and to act upon it reveals just how civilised Egypt is.' Cresswell's papers are still at the AUC."



The moral of Suez

British planes were bombing Egypt, but in London's Trafalgar Square, a 100,000 people gathered to condemn the war. Among them was Tony Benn, a prominent figure in the British labour movement. This week, he spoke to **Hani Shukrallah** of his recollections of the Suez War, and of its moral lessons, still relevant today

On the anti-war movement in Britain

"It was an astonishing period. I do not recall any other period in which there was such public anger in Britain at what was so obviously an act of aggression. The collusion with Israel was known about at the time. We could not prove it, though of course, it has now been proved. We just knew that this was what happened."

"I remember receiving a letter from an RAF pilot stationed in Cyprus asking me what he should do, since he believed that this was an aggressive war, and that if called upon to fight, he felt he should refuse. I wrote back saying: 'Well, I am not going to tell you what to do, but I agree with your view'."

"The Labour Party was totally opposed to the Suez War — unlike its position during the Falklands and the Gulf wars, when the Labour opposition supported the government. Gaitskill, the Labour Party leader at the time, had made a bad speech after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal [in his published diaries, Benn describes it as 'nauseating'], but when the war started, he came out very powerfully against it. It was a breach of the United Nations Charter; it was a breach of the tripartite agreement, it was a breach of everything. He made a series of extremely powerful speeches."

"The people who came onto the streets to protest were from the trade union movement, the peace movement and the labour movement."

"In Britain, there has always been a strong internationalist movement, a peace movement, a trade union movement and a socialist movement which is very powerful. It is still there. Even at the time of the Gulf War, when both parties [Conservative and Labour] supported the attack on Iraq, we had hundreds of thousands of people on the street. It was the same during the Falklands War."

"I was the treasurer of an organisation called the Movement for Colonial Freedom, which was a very powerful anti-imperialist movement in Britain. And some very distinguished Labour leaders were involved in it. We could always mount powerful campaigns."

"But of course in 1956 the difference was that not only could we do that, and still win, but that the Labour opposition was against the war."

"So you had an absolute conflict between the two main political parties. Normally, the opposition to imperialism has been confined to the groups of people whom I mentioned, but did not enjoy much support in parliament. But on that occasion, it was amazing. I went to so many meetings, and sure, some people shouted at us and called us traitors, but many others were very supportive."

"And I think it was a surprise to Eden that despite his comparisons between Nasser and Hitler — which were ridiculous — he could not convince the British people, even though British soldiers were involved and when troops are involved there is a lot of sympathy for your own soldiers. But even so, people knew what this was about. The war was brought to an end partly because of the Americans, but partly because it split the Conservative Party. It was not just the Labour Party which opposed the war. I remember going to see the Conservative minister of defence and asking him to resign in protest at the war. It was rather an unusual thing to do. Here I was, only 35 or so, and I went to a cabinet minister and said, 'will you resign?' and he said: 'Thank you very much for coming. Everything you say is on my mind.'"

"There was enormous opposition in Britain to the war. And that is important from the point of view of Anglo-Egyptian relations. Egyptians should not feel that it was Britain against Egypt, but it was an imperialist government against the Egyptian national movement."

End of empire

"It was a remarkable battle, and of course it destroyed Eden and destroyed the last dream of British imperialism. Eden was personally in a state of nervous collapse. But there is no point in just blaming Eden. Basically, Suez was the last throw of British imperialism."

"The Suez War came at the time of the Russian invasion of Hungary. And whereas the British government was denouncing the Soviet Union, it was itself engaged in an act of aggression against Egypt."

"The broadcasts of the *Shary Al-Adna* station in Cyprus, which had been taken over by the [British] government, were very revealing. In the House of Commons, Eden was claiming that the ultimatum was directed at both Israel and Egypt, to end the fighting and allow Britain and France to re-occupy the Suez Canal. The broadcast from Cyprus, however, never mentioned Israel, because they knew that the real reason behind the attack was the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. So Eden, in London, was saying it had nothing to do with the nationalisation, while the government radio station was addressing extremely hostile messages to the Egyptian people, saying that the attack was punishment for Abdel-Nasser's nationalisation of the Canal."

"So, the lies and untruths came out very, very quickly at the time. And of course, in the end Eden had to resign and the whole thing changed."

"I had served in Egypt myself during World War II, and I remember

meeting a very distinguished Egyptian lawyer on a train between Cairo and Alexandria and how he reflected a burning anger at the way Britain had treated Egypt. It was a crude imperialist relationship."

"In the post-war period, my father, who was a cabinet member and a strong supporter of the Egyptian cause, was sent to Egypt for nearly a year in 1945-6, and his aim was to withdraw from the Tel Al-Kabir base. The obstacles put in his way then were, first, that Russia was a threat and the base was needed for the global strategic interest of Britain, and secondly, that Sudan had to be protected. In fact, these were really just pretexts for Britain to hang on to the Tel Al-Kabir base."

"The Suez Canal, which was a major Egyptian waterway, was [also] used as an excuse, and [US Secretary of State John Foster] Dulles came over and set up the Canal Users Association, and [Robert] Menzies, the Australian prime minister, was sent in. The whole thing was a fraud from beginning to end."

"But it had one good effect; it proved to Britain that the days of empire were over. And of course, it gave President Nasser his proper place as the leader of the Arab nationalist movement which I have always supported."

Whither solidarity?

"In the immediate post World War II period, the anti-colonial movements in the Third World, which won the freedom of India, Pakistan and all the territories occupied by Britain, had its counterpart in a very strong anti-colonial movement in Britain itself, and 1956 was its culmination, if you like."

"Then, with the Thatcher period, you got a swing back to the right. Imperialism is coming back, and with the Soviet Union gone and the Cold War over, the British authorities, and particularly, the American authorities — because Britain doesn't really count — have got to find a new enemy. And the new enemy is Islam, although during the Cold War the Americans funded Islamist movements in fight the communists."

"This has created, undoubtedly, a very, very reactionary element in political life. Look at Clinton and Cuba, Clinton and Libya, the use of sanctions against Iraq, which have killed half a million Iraqi children, North Korea and so on."

"And I have to admit, in all honesty, that the anti-imperialist movement has been quieter and the pro-imperialist movement stronger. But that is not to say that there are not millions of people in Britain, and in America too, who are still instinctively against the so-called new world order, which simply has substituted American imperialism for British imperialism."

The moral of Suez

"The Gulf War had an element of the Crusades about it, where you, Christianity, are fighting against Islam — Richard I of England against Saladin, the Kurdish Muslim leader. And there is no doubt whatever that when you remove socialism and internationalism from the international agenda, then what comes back is nationalism, xenophobia, and fundamentalism."

"But don't think that fundamentalism is limited to Islam. There are Jewish fundamentalists, who believe in the Greater Israel; there are Christian fundamentalists; and the worst fundamentalists of all are the monetarist fundamentalists, who believe that the worship of money should decide everything, replace any God."

"I think this is a product of the abandonment of the perception of a world in which we all have a common interest: a world which working people have an interest in, common people have an interest in, peace in the interest of working class people."

"At you take that vision, that dream out of the world and people go back to their locality, their religion, their hatred of women, their hatred of trade unions, their hatred of socialists. To be honest, it has a sort of Fascist element in it, because mass unemployment brought Hitler to power in Germany, and mass unemployment in America and Britain creates the scapegoat philosophy which leads people to say Islam is the enemy. Now communism is gone, so Islam is the enemy."

"Nevertheless, this view is far from being the only one. Support for the Palestinian cause in Britain, for example, is amazing. There is tremendous support for the Palestinians here, although you might think that because Palestinians are Arabs and Muslim, the public would be hostile to them. Not at all."

"And I think one of the great tragedies of the mass media is that it very rarely projects the supporting elements in countries that are supposed to be enemies. In America there is a marvelous left wing, a marvelous peace movement, a trade union movement — but you never hear about that in Britain. And we only hear about the Islamic fundamentalists in Egypt. We don't hear about the other side because the media goes for the simple populist message which whips up hatred of other countries instead of hatred of systems, and forces peoples against each other."



"I do not recall any other period in which there was so much anger in Britain at what was so obviously an act of aggression," reminisced Tony Benn this week, in an interview with the *Weekly*. Above, Benn addresses anti-war protesters at Trafalgar Square, who were also addressed by Abdel-Azim Anis (sitting, 5th from left), whose recollections of the day appear below

To Trafalgar from Egypt

Abdel Azim Anis, mathematician and political activist, was the only Egyptian to address the crowds at Trafalgar Square during the fateful days of Suez. These are his recollections

Why was I in England on the eve of the Suez War? The story begins four years prior to 26 July, 1956, the date of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. In September 1952, I obtained my PhD in statistics from the Imperial College in London, after which I was appointed lecturer in the Department of Pure Mathematics at the Faculty of Science, Cairo University. Two months before my return home, the July Revolution took place in Egypt. Egyptian students in England met at what was until then the Egyptian Royal Club in Park Lane. We discussed the Free Officers' movement and its declared aims, announced in the first communiqué of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), and unanimously agreed to give our support to the revolution."

Our endorsement of the revolution stemmed from three basic reasons: first, the expulsion of King Farouk from Egypt; secondly, the propagation of the Land Reform Law; and thirdly, the promise to restore a parliamentary democratic system and to reconstitute the constitution. In my capacity as secretary of the National Committee of Egyptian Students in London, I sent a telegram to Cairo expressing our support, which was announced by the Egyptian Broadcasting Station."

Two years later, events took a different turn. The seeds of doubt had been growing, along with a sense of dissatisfaction. Not only was there no sign of a parliamentary system, but suppression of opinion had escalated to new heights. Sweeping arrest campaigns were taking place. Two workers were executed after a summary and unfair military trial in Kafr El-Dawwar. The crisis which broke out in March 1954 between Mohamed Naguib and Khaled Mohieddin on the one hand, and Nasser and his group on the other, brought to the surface the rift between those who wanted the restoration of parliamentary life, and the holding of public elections and those opposed to such measures. Therefore, it was only natural that university staff members should sign a petition to the RCC calling for the return of the army to its barracks, the restoration of the representative system of government and the reinstatement of the constitution."

Nasser emerged victorious from the March 1954 crisis, and Mohamed Naguib was removed from office, while Khaled Mohieddin was sent into exile in Switzerland. The regime sought to punish those university lecturers who had signed the petition and, on 29

Diaries 'Hope my words go out to Cairo'

Extracts from, Tony Benn, *Years of Hope: Diaries, Letters and Papers 1940-1962*, Hutchinson, London. Reprinted courtesy of the author

Tuesday 30 October 1956

I heard on the early bulletin this morning of the Israeli attack on Egypt. The weekend news had been grave from the Middle East but I don't think anybody except those in the know had expected it to explode so rapidly and so seriously. I went to the House of Commons after lunch and heard the Prime Minister's statement announcing the ultimatum in Egypt and the decision to demand the right to occupy the Suez Canal."

Gaitskill made a brilliant comeback following the Prime Minister's statement. The lead he gave us will certainly set the tone of the Party's attitude to this whole crisis. The House was in complete uproar."

But the impending aggression by Britain has touched a very deep chord in the hearts of every member of the Labour Party bar one or two."

Wednesday 31 October 1956

I rang the Movement for Colonial Freedom and asked them to book Trafalgar Square for a rally on Sunday afternoon. This they did at once and the meeting was handed over to the Labour Party the same day."

The character and volume of the public protest now developing is most interesting. It has rallied round informed people of every political allegiance. *The Manchester Guardian* provides the intellectual leadership in the country and the Churches, leading figures in science, universities and among professional people are coming out solidly on this."

Thursday 1 November 1956

This morning's news of the bombings added additional tragedy to the situation. The news contained an item that Egypt was con-

templating withdrawal from the UN because of the failure of the UN to help her. I decided to ring the Egyptian Embassy at once to urge them not to do this. I spoke to the ambassador's private secretary and explained that the veto cast yesterday by Britain and France was not the end of the matter. Today the General Assembly meets and its decision is a foregone conclusion. I asked the secretary to ask the ambassador to send an urgent message to Cairo to get this decision reversed. I also added these words: 'Please convey this message to the Ambassador and add to them an expression on behalf of the vast majority of the British people of the feelings that he must know we all have. ... At any rate, very late tonight the Egyptian Government announced that the reports of its intended withdrawal from the UN were quite without foundation...'

Shortly after getting back into the House someone whispered that I would be called next. I had no speech prepared and I scribbled over headlines on a piece of paper. I spoke for over 20 minutes and it certainly was, from my point of view, the best speech I have ever made."

"... It is because my right hon. and hon. Friends and I feel that to put troops in any illegal war of aggression is a crime against those troops that we have moved our motion of censure in the House tonight. These are bitter words. I make no apology for them."

"... I say sincerely that no country has committed as many crimes against Egypt as this country has; and I say quite sincerely — and I hope that my words go out to Cairo, because unless some of us say what is in our hearts, we shall have no friends in Egypt in the future — that I am ashamed that within three months of evacuating Egypt, following seventy or eight years occupation, British troops should be going in again, provoked into it by the fact that Egypt was herself the subject of an attack."

Friday 2 November 1956

This morning Guy Wint from the *Manchester*

Guardian rang to say that he hoped I would make the meeting in Cambridge University tonight the kicking-off point for the national campaign. I promised him that I would think of a slogan and a symbol that would unite us all."

Monday

5 November 1956

Thinking of positive ways we might help, I got on in the Red Cross this morning to see whether blood supplies could be sent to the Middle East from Britain. I spoke to Lady Limerick of the British Red Cross. The arrangements apparently are very simple..."

Today I was sitting in the Smoking Room when George Wigg came in breathing heavily and sat down beside me. 'I've done a bloody silly thing,' he said. 'I've whalloped a Tory. A few minutes ago in the Members' Clubroom.' It turned out to be Leslie Thomas, the Member for Canterbury, whose father Jimmy Thomas was a Labour Cabinet Minister before the war. 'He said "Gaitskill's a bloody traitor." I said I'd rather be led by a bloody traitor than a f—ing murderer. He asked me to come outside and as we left the cloakroom, he swiped me. So I gave him one in the belly and two or three more and he went down like a felled ox'..."

Tuesday 6 November 1956

Spoke at University College London Labour Club on the situation. 200 very serious students — not by any means all Labour — who sat in perfect silence and asked the most penetrating questions. Lost control of emotions during my speech — as last night. I think it's the tension and strain that does it."



To the House of Commons at 7pm where the Lobby was full of excited chattering members, talking about cease-fire. I do not believe it — it is too incredible. Two other members confirm it. It must be true. It is true. Feel like jumping in the air and cheering. Am engaged in a mild caper when spot Bessie Braddock. 'Bessie I want to kiss you,' I said, 'Bessie, with a huge smile, replied, 'Not now, dearie, with all these people about.' Home at 8. Happy and very exhausted. But couldn't go to bed till 2 for trying to think out what all this means and what the lessons are. Will try to set down some first reactions tomorrow."

Thursday 15 November 1956

Eden's personality underwent a complete change towards the beginning of the Suez crisis. [William] Clark dates this at about the time that he collapsed with a fever when he visited Lady Eden in hospital. He is, said Clark, and I quote, 'a criminal lunatic'."

ER SUEZ



September 1954, the RCC issued a decree sacking 42 faculty members in Egyptian universities, belonging to a wide spectrum of trends and movements. Among those sacked were Dr Tawfik El-Shawi, Dr Abdel-Moneim El-Shargawi, Dr Louis Awad, Dr Fawzi Mansour, Dr Mohamed Asfour, Dr Abdel-Razek Hassan, Mr Mahmoud El-Akabi and myself.

I was in London for the summer when the decision of the RCC was issued, working on research and complicated mathematical calculations at a time when computers were not yet available. I recall that one of my professors told me that he had been asked to recommend somebody to lecture in mathematical statistics at a college in London and that, if I were interested, he would recommend my name. I thanked him for his offer, and explained that I did not want to leave my job at Cairo University.

When we docked in Alexandria on 27 September, I had no idea that I had been sacked only three days before. Evidently, after hearing the news, I cabled my professor, explaining my new situation and asking him to recommend me for the job I had just turned down. As appointments in Britain take some time, I decided to accept an offer from the International Institute for Statistics in The Hague to teach a four-month course in its nascent subsidiary institute in Lebanon. Shortly afterwards, I received a letter from the Chelsea College of Science and Technology in London, telling me that I had been appointed Senior Lecturer, and that I was to start work on 1 March, 1955.

My wife and five-year-old daughter joined me in London shortly after. We lived in a small furnished flat in Chiswick, a green and quiet neighbourhood at the time. Our life acquired a stable rhythm: my daughter went to a nearby school, my wife resumed studies in biology at the Imperial College, and I worked on my lectures and research. In the summer of 1956 we arranged to spend a holiday on the Channel Island of Guernsey, and it was in a small hotel there that we spent the last two weeks of July.

I was on an island with my family, when Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. I vividly remember that day, as we went out for a walk in the afternoon, came back and rested for a while, then went downstairs to the restaurant

for dinner. An Indian colleague approached me and whispered: "Where have you been all this time, have you not heard the news about Egypt? Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal." At first I thought he was joking, but when he assured me he was not we went to hear the evening news on the TV. All those in the hotel lounge were dumbfounded. They all seemed to be turning to us for some explanation, or for our opinion as to what we thought would happen next.

My wife and I spent the night discussing the matter from every conceivable angle, asking ourselves if we were on the brink of war, how that would affect our life in Britain, and our academic work, which we had hoped would go on uninterrupted for a few years.

The next day I rang the secretary of the Movement for Colonial Freedom, a society headed by Labour MP Fenner Brockway (later Lord Brockway). I asked the secretary about her expectations regarding the Movement's reaction to the new developments. I had been an active member of the Movement, and on hearing my voice, she exclaimed: "Where are you? We have been looking for you everywhere to participate in the meetings we plan to organise on the Suez Canal issue and threat of war." I told her I would be back in London on 31 July, and would be at the disposal of the Movement as of 1 August.

I immediately decided to resign from my position at university. I wished to be free to move. I also wished to save the college (which had so generously offered me a post as staff member), any embarrassment in the upcoming crisis. I wrote a letter of resignation addressed to the dean of the College and posted it from the island. When we met in London, the dean tried to dissuade me from resigning, assuring me that, since Nasser was taking charge of the problem, he would surely find a solution to the crisis between Egypt and Britain. I had reached the conclusion, however, that war would almost certainly break out. I had reasons which corroborated my belief. Israel had been en-

gaged in military skirmishes in Gaza for some time. Egypt had announced its arms purchases from Czechoslovakia, and it seemed natural that a war would occur before Egypt had time to master the new weapons. Egypt's long-standing support for the Algerian revolution was reason enough for France to seek to settle its accounts with Nasser.

August and September were busy months as I travelled widely to attend meetings held by local trade unions or organised by branches of the Labour Party in coordination with the Movement. At these meetings I talked about the history of the Canal, explaining how it was dug by Egyptian peasants conscripted into forced labour, tens of thousands of whom had died during the work, and how France and Britain had seized the shares in the Canal. My statements were generally well received by the public, although hostile and contemptuous reactions were also apparent. Among other cities, I visited Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Glasgow, explaining the position of Egypt and the dangers of war.

The meetings went on until October, when the spectre of war began to loom larger. A major demonstration was organised in Trafalgar Square, inviting the British people to voice their opposition to the war over Suez. Multitudes marched down the streets from Hyde Park Corner to Trafalgar Square. On the first rows were the main leaders of the rally, as well as the musicians playing their brass instruments. The prominent Labour MPs and the leaders of the Movement for Colonial Freedom stood under the statue of Nelson to deliver their speeches as the crowds advanced steadily towards the square. I stood there among them waiting for my turn to speak, while a British friend of mine carried my daughter on his shoulders so that she could see her father addressing the crowds, estimated then at about 100,000. Among the speakers were a number of MPs including Fenner Brockway, Tony Benn, and others. They all attacked Mr Eden's policies with out-

rage and strength.

Two days after the Trafalgar Square demonstration, two incidents took place which are still vivid in my memory. The first was the appearance in the *Daily Telegraph* of an item claiming I was an official from the Egyptian Information Department, sent by Nasser to address the rally. Evidently, this was only meant to tarnish the sponsors of the rally. The newspaper had mixed up the name of Mahmoud Anis, one of Dr Abdel-Quader Hatem's assistants in the Information Department, with my own name. The newspaper publicly recognised this error later.

The second unforgettable incident is the call I received from the military attaché in the Egyptian Embassy in London the day before the demonstration, asking me to visit him in his office for an important matter. When I went to see him early on the day of the march, he actually asked me to refrain from participating in the Trafalgar Square rally. The embassy believed that I might seize the opportunity to criticise Nasser's regime. I explained to him that, as an Egyptian, I was duty bound to participate in the rally, and that I would not have anybody dissuade me from doing so.

When war broke out on 29 October, I booked a plane to Khartoum with my family, since flights to Egypt were stopped. We remained there until flights to Cairo were resumed in late November.

Since my return to Cairo at the end of 1956, I visited Britain four times. On three of these occasions, I received a generous invitation to stay as a visiting professor for one year at a British university to conduct research funded by the British Science Research Council. I am indeed grateful to those British friends who offered me such opportunities. On each of my four visits, however, I had to wait for long periods to obtain an entry visa. I understood from the British Consulate that the reason I had to wait so long every time was that my entry to England had to be cleared by the Foreign Office in London.

Eden's propaganda war

The British media was not as free as it would like to believe at the time of Suez, writes Roger Hardy

It has often been supposed that, in his handling of the media, Anthony Eden was an aristocratic amateur. It has been argued that, during the Suez crisis, this was a fatal flaw, since it meant he failed to win over a sceptical press and so, in the end, lost the battle for public opinion.

Forty years on, either of these claims stands up in scrutiny. Aristocratic, Eden certainly was, and his methods of dealing with the media were distinctly old-fashioned — his preferred method was to use the old-boy network. But his handling of the media, particularly during the Suez crisis, was more successful than has generally been acknowledged. Many editors and journalists supported his stand against Egypt, either of their own accord — out of a sense of patriotic duty or imperial pride, or from hostility to Nasser and Arab nationalism — or as a direct result of pressure or manipulation by the Eden government.

When I made a BBC radio programme recently to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Suez crisis, I was able to interview some of the journalists who had worked in Fleet Street or for the BBC at the time. I also interviewed a young British historian, Tony Shaw, who earlier this year published the fullest account of the subject which has yet appeared — and one which challenges a number of earlier assumptions.

Entitled, *Eden, Suez and the Mass Media*, Shaw's book is based not just on close monitoring of what the press and the BBC were producing at the time, but also on a mass of documentation including British government papers released under the thirty-year rule. His book, well received by reviewers, makes uncomfortable reading for anyone who thinks a free press has a crucial role to play in a free society.

Some newspapers did, of course, stand up to Eden. *The Guardian* — *The Manchester Guardian* as it was then — opposed the use of force from the start, and the *Observer* virtually from the start. They were a constant thorn in Eden's side. So was the *Economist*, which also took a consistently anti-government line and, like them, received an extremely hostile postbag as a result.

The *Times*, in contrast, took a tough anti-Nasser line, something Eden did much to encourage. He singled out the newspaper for his personal attention, holding a number of meetings during the crisis with the editor, William Haley, and the foreign editor, Ivor MacDonald. Astonishingly, Eden told MacDonald about collusion — he was the only journalist to be given such preferential treatment — within days of the secret meeting in Stèvres, on the outskirts of Paris, at which Britain, France and Israel agreed on their plan to attack Egypt.

McDonald in turn told Haley. The two men were personally horrified (particularly at the idea of deceiving Britain's ally, the United States) and professionally compromised. They had inside knowledge but, because they had obtained it confidentially, could not use it. The *Times* did not rally wholeheartedly to Eden's side, as the prime minister had clearly hoped, but remained, in the judgment of historian Tony Shaw, sitting nervously on the fence.

If the *Times* was on the fence, the BBC was on the rack. Eden expected it to rally to the government's side as it had during the second world war. He wanted it — in its broadcasts in English but also, crucially, in Arabic — to counter Nasser's *Voice of the Arabs*. Senior BBC officials saw things differently. They believed that, at a time when British opinion was so sharply divided, the BBC had a duty to reflect both government and opposition views.

In two important respects, the BBC did stand up to Eden. When, in early November, the prime minister broadcast a defence of his actions on radio and television, the BBC insisted it must give Labour leader Hugh Gaitskill the right of reply. Despite intense government pressure, it stuck to this line, and Gaitskill's withering critique of the whole Suez operation was broadcast — at the very moment when British troops were on their way to Egypt.

Secondly, the BBC insisted on broadcasting on its various language services — including Arabic — its regular summaries of the British press. Eden was furious that the views of the *Guardian* and other papers which opposed his Suez policy should be broadcast to the world in this way.

But the BBC's record during the Suez crisis is mixed. On the basis of a thorough review of its output, domestically and overseas, Tony Shaw believes that its commentaries took a pro-government line — even if its news broadcasts were, on the whole, impartial. In addition, he highlights the role of a senior BBC man, Hugh Carleton-Greene, who sat on a Foreign Office committee whose role — as revealed by recently released papers — was to produce propaganda with the explicit aim of overthrowing Nasser. Carleton-Greene, brother of the novelist Graham Greene, went on to become director-general of the BBC.

The BBC's dilemma sometimes produced comic results. Its producers were bound by an arcane restriction known as the Fourteen-Day Rule, under which an issue could not be discussed on the air if it was due to be debated in parliament in the coming fortnight. This even affected the popular radio panel programme *Any Questions*. When, in early November, one of the panelists tried to circumvent the Fourteen-Day Rule by referring to Egypt as Ruritania, the programme was taken off the air.

The writer is a Middle East specialist with the BBC World Service. His radio programme on Suez and the British Media was broadcast, in the assignment series, on 30 and 31 October.

Scenes

"The day after nationalisation, when it was clear that the Western Big Three were all hostile to Nasser and that his Russian friends were likely to be preoccupied elsewhere, Israel requested a big increase in French arms shipments. On 7 August at a meeting in the graceful old Defence Ministry in Rue St. Dominique, not far from the Invalides, the French gave the Israelis their approval for massive deliveries... The Frenchmen present at the meeting included Bourges-Maumoury, General Paul Ely, the French Chief of Staff, Admiral Pierre Barjot, who was to become Commander-in-Chief of the French invasion forces, and Abel Thomas, Bourges-Maumoury's chief aide and an ardent Zionist. Shimon Peres, Director General of the Defence Ministry, represented Israel."

"Bourges-Maumoury asked Peres how long it would take Israel's forces to reach the Suez Canal in an operation across the Sinai Peninsula. Peres replied: 'About one week. One of the high-ranking officers then asked Peres if Israel would be willing to attack Egypt in concert with France. Peres instantly answered: 'Yes.' (Kenneth Love, *Suez: The Twice Fought War*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1969)

"Technically and juridically, the nationalisation [of the Suez Canal] was impeccable. One of the British officials I spoke to in London on the night of nationalisation said there might be nothing to do in response 'except twiddle our thumbs.'... 'We would like to be beastly to Nasser,' one official told me, 'but we haven't figured out a sensible way to do it.' The British never did."

"On 28 July Britain blocked all Egyptian shipping. This was a unilateral violation of the Anglo-Egyptian currency agreement concluded in 1953. 'It is an ordinary action of sovereignty,' an official said defensively, unconsciously echoing Egypt's defence of nationalisation." (Kenneth Love, *Suez: The Twice Fought War*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1969)

"O Egyptian People, your broadcasting station was destroyed. From now on you will listen to the voice of Allied Armies Command from this very frequency."

"O Egyptians, this is the first blow which has befallen you. Why has this befallen you? First, because Abdel-Nasser went mad and seized the Suez Canal which is of vital importance to the world."

(Limassol — The Voice of the Allied Armies Command in Arabic To the Near East Nov 2 1956 1.45 GMT — Source: Tony Benn's diaries)

"Now listen carefully to us. You have hidden in small villages. Do you know what this means? It means that we are obliged to bomb you wherever you are. Imagine your villages being bombed. Imagine your wives, children, mothers, fathers, and grandfathers escaping from their houses and leaving their property behind... We will find and bomb you wherever you hide... You have committed a sin, that is, you placed confidence in Abdel-Nasser and believed his lies."

"Now you are hearing the truth. This is the Supreme Allied Command addressing Egyptian soldiers, sailors, and pilots." (Limassol — Voice of Britain in Arabic to the Near East Nov 4 1956 0525 GMT — Source: Tony Benn's diaries)

Document

Collusion

Below is the text of the "The Protocol Of Sèvres", signed on 24 October 1956 by representatives of Britain, France and Israel

The results of the conversations which took place at Sèvres from 22-24 October 1956 between the representatives of the Governments of the United Kingdom, the State of Israel and of France are the following:

1- The Israeli forces launch in the evening of 29 October 1956 a large scale attack on the Egyptian forces with the aim of reaching the Canal zone the following day.

2- On being apprised of these events, the British and French Governments during the day of 30 October 1956 respectively and simultaneously make two appeals to the Egyptian Government and the Israeli Government on the following lines:

A. To the Egyptian Government

(a) halt all acts of war.

(b) withdraw all its troops ten miles from the Canal.

(c) accept temporary occupation of key positions on the Canal by the Anglo-French forces to guarantee freedom of passage through the Canal by vessels of all nations until a final settlement.

B. To the Israeli Government

(a) halt all acts of war.

(b) withdraw all its troops ten miles to the east of the Canal.

In addition, the Israeli Government will be notified that the French and British Government have demanded of the Egyptian Government to accept temporary occupation of key positions along the Canal by Anglo-French forces.

It is agreed that if one of the Governments re-

fused, or did not give its consent, within twelve hours the Anglo-French forces would intervene with the means necessary to ensure that their demands are accepted.

C. The representatives of the three Governments agree that the Israeli Government will not be required to meet the conditions in the appeal addressed to it, in the event that the Egyptian Government does not accept those in the appeal addressed to it for their part.

3- In the event that the Egyptian Government should fail to agree within the stipulated time to the conditions of the appeal addressed to it, the Anglo-French forces will launch military operations against the Egyptian forces in the early hours of the morning of 31 October.

4- The Israeli Government will send forces to occupy the western shore of the Gulf of Akaba and the group of islands Tirane and Sanafir to ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Akaba.

5- Israel undertakes not to attack Jordan during the period of operations against Egypt.

But in the event that during the same period Jordan should attack Israel, the British Government undertakes not to come to the aid of Jordan.

6- The arrangements of the present protocol must remain strictly secret.

7- They will enter into force after the agreement of the three Governments.

(signed)

David Ben-Gurion Patrick Dean
Christian Pineau

Recollections of horror and heroism, as Dina Ezzat speaks to the man who led the guerrilla war against the invaders, and to some of the people who waged it.

'We will fight'

The parties to the tripartite aggression made many miscalculations. Their greatest blunder, however, was to believe that the Egyptian people would surrender in terror. Tens of thousands carried arms and a guerrilla war was launched against the invading forces. Kameleddin Hussein, the then-chief of the civilian-based People's Liberation Army, recalls the heady days of Suez



Photo: Sherif Samir

In July 1956 when Gamal Abdel-Nasser decided to nationalise the Suez Canal, he knew that the West would most likely launch a retaliatory military offensive against Egypt.

As time passed and war seemed inevitable, the country began to prepare itself. "We saw the gathering clouds of war. We anticipated it was going to happen when the Suez Canal was nationalised," recalled Kameleddin Hussein, a leading Free Officer and a key figure in the early years of Nasser's government. "We had to be ready. Everyone had to be prepared."

Hussein played a key role in the preparations. To help the revolutionary government evict the British forces from Egyptian territory in the canal zone, he called up and enlarged the popular army he had established in 1952.

The concept behind mobilising a popular army, explained Hussein, was to fight a battle on two fronts. A country with a strong well-equipped army may be confident that it would crush a country with a weaker army. But the invaders may think twice if it must battle with an entire nation of warriors. "Guerrilla warfare has historically been proven to be a decisive element in any war," he added.

In line with this thinking, the revolutionary government provided military training for volunteers and high school students. "We excluded nobody, women were also mobilised. We believed that society could not be strong if women did not know how to carry arms and defend themselves when needed," Hussein said. "We were not expecting women to be a part of the army, but we wanted them to be acquainted with firearms just in case."

The role of the People's Liberation Army during the war was to provide back up for the regular troops of the Egyptian armed forces and launch commando attacks against the invading forces. Hussein said, "There is no doubt that they were instrumental in getting the British to agree to the evacuation."

On 26 July 1956 while Nasser was stunning the world by nationalising the Suez Canal, Hussein was opening training camps across the country. "From the moment I knew about the nationalisation decision, I knew we had to get the popular army in good shape. Nasser assigned me to be the chief of that army which

was to work in coordination with the armed forces," he said.

"We had training camps in all governorates. In every public square we had a shooting range for training. In Alexandria, along the Corniche, men and women were learning how to fire arms," Hussein said.

Nasser fully supported a strong popular front. As historians tell it, he wanted the people and the army to be one solid front in the face of aggression. "I made a point of arranging trips for Nasser

to the different camps. It really meant a lot to the people who were putting their lives on the line to see Nasser inspecting their camps and talking to them. It was a big morale boost for everyone," he recalled.

And just as Nasser boosted the morale of the People's Liberation Army, the performance, confidence and attitude of the army lifted the spirit of Nasser and his senior army officials. "As the war drew near, Nasser went to Ismailia to inspect a camp there.

He was very concerned, but when he saw the camp and sensed the spirit of the people who were willing to fight till the last bullet, he felt much better," Hussein said. Everyone was chanting, "We will fight! We will fight!"

The People's Liberation Army was divided into units, each of which was headed by an officer from the armed forces, Hussein explained. "It was an army of civilians, but we had to have officers for training and command. But it was not very strict because I knew that this army was not used to the tough discipline of an armed force," he said.

In fact, life went on as normal for most of the volunteers. "You would see a civil servant cycling from work to his training camp with a gun on his shoulder, a student running from school to fetch his gun for training, or a vegetable merchant sitting with his gun on his stool," Hussein recalled. "People believed that the forces of aggression would have to go over the bodies of each and every one of them to complete the occupation."

During that time, a million guns and sub-machine guns were distributed to help civilians take matters into their own hands. Something over one tenth of these (around 150,000 pieces) were effective, however, and most of these went to the coastal city of Port Said where ferocious fighting took place starting 3 November 1956.

"The large number of civilians that volunteered for recruitment and the spirit with which they fought the battle against the aggressors is evidence that the people, at large, supported the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and believed they had a battle to fight," Hussein emphasised.

Forty years after Suez, Hussein, now an elderly man, speaks with the passion of youth, "This battle was a challenge to our national will. This is why we won."

It was this sense of defiance, Hussein insists, that led Nasser to say that he would rather commit suicide than surrender when some members of the Revolution Command Council suggested that he should give himself up to the British Embassy "to save Egypt from the disaster of a war with France, Britain and Israel."

Guns and songs

In Suez, the songs of war tuned up the will of a nation, recalls freedom fighter and lyricist Mohamed Ghazali

"Now is the time, my people. Let our guns do the talking. Into the heart of Sinai let our fighting go. And for this year, let the prayers of war be our call."

These words, and many more verses were penned by Mohamed Ghazali, better known as Captain Ghazali, as the clouds of war gathered over Suez in 1956. Originally a wrestler, Ghazali fought with the guerrilla forces against the British occupation forces until their departure in June 1956.

Now in his early 70s, the songwriter and freedom fighter has many sad memories about the effects of foreign occupation.

"I am a political activist. I participated in every war

from 1948 to 1973. But my participation was never confined to simply taking up the struggle. Patriotic songs had a big role to play during war time," he said.

Ghazali wrote lyrics, which were sung to the music of the *semseya* (a crude homemade guitar), by all the guerrilla forces and local citizens of Suez. He likened the impact of these songs to the force of bombs and machine guns.

These songs, he said, "kept people's morale up. They were about how important it was for us to stand strong in the face of aggression, our right to defend our country. They encouraged people to fight and told them it was better to die underneath a city completely bombed out by the enemy than live under occupation."

The 1956 war was especially tough, Ghazali re-

called. "The real fighting happened in Port Said. In Suez there were no paratroopers or serious bombing, but we knew that Sinai was occupied and we feared that the Israelis might cross the canal and occupy Suez."

So, during that time, according to Ghazali, one of the major tasks of the guerrillas in Suez was to make sure that no frogmen sneaked ashore. "It was not an easy task. It meant that we had to stay awake all night. Some of us had to keep jumping in the water and search for any trespassers," he said.

And all along, the songs were sung by the guerrillas. "We sang them to cheer ourselves up and to drown our worries, fears and exhaustion," Ghazali recalled. Meanwhile, the state had opened its training camps

for men and women volunteers. According to Ghazali, who is acclaimed as a hero in all of Suez, "It was an exceptional time, even before the war started. Traditionally, Suez was a conservative city. Women did not work outside the home. But somehow, that particular war made things different and women started to come out. Side by side with men they took part in the guerrilla training, singing patriotic songs and also cooking and distributing meals."

Ghazali described the guerrillas as the Egyptian army's strategic line of defence. "And when the war ended and the aggressors went back after their defeat we all sang together, to the strains of *semseya*, songs for Egypt."

Brutality unforgotten

Four decades on, three women of Port Said recall the devastation of their city

"We saw horrors" is the unanimous response from Madina, Haniya and Aliya, three Port Said women in their late 60s, upon mention of the tripartite aggression and the occupation of their coastal city by the British and French troops in 1956.

At that time, the three were young girls living peacefully with their husbands and children. "But all of a sudden everything turned into a nightmare," said Madina. "If I lived for a million years, I will never forget the horrors of that time. I will never forget the British soldiers who stormed into our house at night and arrested every man in the family including the young boys."

With an unmistakable look of sadness in her eyes, Madina remembered the "brutality of the British soldiers" who did not allow her husband to put on a warm sweater and forced her young son to wake up and go with them. "It was such a shock for my young boy to open his eyes and see men with their guns pointed at him and his father," she said.

She added, "They told us it would only take a few hours, but days passed before the young boys came back home to their families with word that the men were to be kept in the custody of the British." When the boys were rounded up in an attempt to stem the popular armed resistance and acts of sabotage against the invasion forces. The prisoners would be herded 200 to a room and denied food for days, Port Saidis recall. "I clearly remember my husband telling me that the British soldiers would sit and eat their canned fruits and when they finished they would throw the empty cans at our men," Madina said.

According to both Aliya and Madina, after the British soldiers left, the French soldiers came for another round. And by the time the searches ended the houses were in complete chaos. "It did not look like the nice house I used to live in at all," said Madina. But that was the least of anyone's worries because the city was being bombed. El-Raswa Bridge, which linked the city to the highways, was bombed and entire districts were completely destroyed.

"It was real destruction all over," said Haniya. "I remember at the time I was eight months pregnant and food was short, so the young boys in the family used to go down the streets hunting for chickens that escaped their hen houses," she added.

And the streets were dotted with the bodies of Egyptian men who were gunned down by British and French soldiers. "On every street, there were so many bodies. The British and French soldiers forbade families from removing the bodies of their killed kinsmen," said Aliya. "But I remember there was a big guy, called Mohamed El-Matin, who used to sneak at night and get tree branches to cover the bodies. He was such a hero, but the British killed him," she added.

Finally, the local population had to evacuate. "The government got buses and large trucks for people to load their stuff and leave the city. It was all so painful. Everybody, men and women, were in tears. We left and we did not know when or if we would come back," said Madina.

And when they came back, the city looked completely different. Haniya recalled, "It was the city we lived and grew up in. Although much of its beauty was destroyed, it didn't really matter because we knew that the British and French were gone forever."

The network

A clandestine network of fishermen and civilians provided secret service workers with the cover they needed in Port Said, remembers intelligence officer, Samir Ghanem

For Samir Ghanem, intelligence officer, the task of collecting information about the tripartite forces and launching attacks against the invaders' bases and arms supplies would have been extremely difficult had it not been for the local fishermen of Port Said.

"I still remember Anm Moustafa, the fisherman who took me and my assistant on his boat, gave me one of his outfits to conceal my identity and a basket full of fish to hide my walkie-talkie," remembered Ghanem. "It was a big risk, but he did it out of love for his country."

Some men from the ranks of the British and French forces also cooperated with the resistance, according to Ghanem. "We had Egyptian, Greek and Italian agents who collected information for us about the armament and plans of the British and French forces, but we had to depend on go-betweens to get us this information because it would not have been wise to expose the members of the team," he said. And it was not only the fishermen who supported the intelligence team in Port Said. "The residents, too, were very supportive," Ghanem recalled. Civilians provided hiding places, food and care for Ghanem and his men.

When the British finally left, intelligence agents, fishermen and all those involved in the popular resistance blew up the famous statue of French diplomat De Lesseps using explosives.

De Lesseps had come to be regarded as a symbol of foreign domination of the Suez Canal. It was he who got the concession to build the canal in the 1850s. Until Gamal Abdel-Nasser nationalised the waterway in July 1956, it had been run by a Paris-based Anglo-French company which held most of the shares.



Othman (left) lost his eyes in the battle to defend his nation's freedom. "A small price to pay," he continues to insist, forty years later. Ghazali (top left), composed songs for the guerrilla war, and from Suez, smuggled arms and ammunition to the freedom fighters in Port Said. Madina, Aliya and Haniya (top right) have not forgotten the horrors of living in a city brutalised by invading forces

A hero of Suez

Forty years ago, Mohamed Mahran Othman fearlessly withstood the brutality of imperialism. From the Port Said Military Museum, where he works as a curator, he tells his story

"The British took away my eyes while I was defending my country during the 1956 war. They told me, 'We are going to take away your eyes so that you would be an example for all people in your country who try to defy us.'"

"But when late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser came to visit me at the hospital he told me: 'They were wrong. When they took away your eyes they made you a symbol of the battle of the colonised against colonial forces.'"

"I was not alone in defending my country. There was an entire army of civilian guerrillas and we were all willing to die for our country. I was greatly honoured to head one of these factions. Our mission was to defend the Port Said airport, the northern-western road of the city, and El-Gamil Bridge which linked Port Said to Damietta."

"So we moved to El-Gamil (10 kilometres west of Port Said) and started training on the ground of what was expected to be the battle scene. Training continued until 29 October 1956, when Israel attacked Sinai. Then came the British-French ultimatum which gave Israel the right to occupy most of Sinai and demanded that Egypt give up the Suez Canal area."

"But when Egypt refused, British and French forces ferociously bombed Port Said, severely damaging the city."

"On 5 November I was on the front in El-Gamil with my group. We saw the paratroopers of the aggressor landing there. We attacked and killed several of them. Then the serious fighting started between the Port Said guerrillas and the aggressor forces."

"Despite the enormous courage shown by the guerrillas in the battle, the aggressors managed to move

very close to the airport.

"I was hiding in a trench with another guerrilla, whose name was Zakarya Ahmed. I told him to intensify his shooting because death was drawing near. Zakarya decided to run to his death. He left the trench and engaged in face-to-face fighting with the aggressors. Zakarya was killed. I threw hand grenades on the aggressors and sought shelter in another trench from where I kept shooting. But they surrounded the trench and a bullet grazed my head. I lost consciousness."

"When I regained consciousness I found that they had actually occupied the area. I could not face it. I wished I had died before seeing that moment."

"I was surrounded by about 20 British soldiers. They were sitting drinking and making fun of me. I asked them to stop and give me a drink of water. But they refused. They told me, 'Nasser did not bring any water for you.' I replied, 'Nasser does not have to bring me water because there is water to drink everywhere in my country.' But they still refused."

"Then they started swearing at me and at my country. I asked them to stop but they didn't."

"I was taken to the Port Said airport where I was interrogated by British soldiers. They asked me for detailed information about the guerrillas' cells and activities. But I refused to answer any of their questions. The British investigator threatened that if I did not answer their questions I would be severely punished."

"The investigator told me I would pay the price. He said that one of the British soldiers I wounded in battle was blind-

ed and that they were going to pull out my eyes so that soldier could see."

"Then they flew me to Cyprus where I was taken to the Royal British Hospital."

"The British doctor who was supposed to operate on me, told me that he was willing to remove only one of my eyes if I would cooperate by giving recorded answers to questions."

"But when he put the tape recorder before me, I said, 'I am praying for God to help our leader in Egypt to keep on fighting.' The doctor hit me on the face and I was taken to the operating room."

"That was the last day I ever saw anything."

"After the operation they flew me back to Egypt where I was taken to an Egyptian hospital and surrounded with much care and love."

"I never regretted what I did. They took away my eyes but failed to shake my patriotism."

"I was always willing to sacrifice anything for my country."

city in search of the perpetrators.

"At the time of the July Revolution, I was almost 14-years-old and completely preoccupied with the interests of my country. I was very happy when the news of the revolution broke."

"The British forces completed withdrawal from Egypt in June 1956. We all celebrated independence when Nasser came to Port Said and replaced the British flag—which had desecrated our soil and air for 74 years—with the Egyptian flag. We were cheering and chanting 'God is great!'"

"After the tripartite aggression ended, Nasser paid me another visit to thank me for what I did for my country."

"And while I was in the hospital I met my wife, who was a young woman from Port Said. She offered to give me one of her eyes to help me see again. We were blessed with two daughters; one is a doctor and the other is an interior designer."

"About a year after the war ended, I heard that the British soldier who got my cornea committed suicide because his wife left him after she discovered the truth."

"The only news that I still wish to hear is God's revenge on the brutal doctor who took away my eyes. But, if I don't, it is all right because I sacrificed my eyes for my country. And that was such a cheap price to pay for freedom."

Supplement edited by Hani Shukrallah

German business lunch

THE GERMAN Chamber of Commerce held a business lunch this past week at the Cairo Sheraton. Attendees discussed the possibility of establishing an Egyptian-German businessmen's association. Attending the lunch were Nawal Tawfik, minister of economy; Hussein Kamel, minister of education, as well as Yousef Boutros Ghali, cabinet minister. Graduates of the German School in Cairo will form the association, aimed at boosting Egyptian-German ties. Economic conferences and workshops will be held to expand businessmen's knowledge of management.

Microsoft training programmes

ABS Co has recently opened the latest training centre for Microsoft programmes such as Windows 95, Windows NT and Microsoft Office. State-of-the-art technology can be found in the centre. Every trainee has his own terminal to train on. Trainers are authorised by Microsoft Co. The training schedule is very flexible with training hours given in morning and at night, every day except Friday.

MONEY & BUSINESS

Preparations underway for the economic conference

The three-day economic conference which is scheduled to begin on 12 November will witness the participation of about 80 countries that are expected to participate on the ministerial level.

Ambassador Raouf Saad, assistant foreign minister for economic cooperation, stated that the ministry has gone through with all the required procedures related to the conference. The conference will be an occasion for each participant to explain its views. It can be the right opportunity for Egypt to further stabilise its economy during its time of economic transformation.

The Foreign Ministry has been co-ordinating with all parties concerned in order to not have to face sudden obstacles.

Saad also noted that the conference will include expanded sessions and workshops which will present an overview of the conference topics.

The opening session which bears the name "Peace and Economic Development" is among the five sessions that will discuss means of improving economies, regional banking system as well as privatisation, small and medium-scale projects. On the sidelines of the conference are direct meetings among businessmen and representatives of Egyptian and European companies. This will open the gate for carrying out transactions and will expand the volume of knowledge for participants and businessmen on each other, Saad stated.

NBE and universal banking

THE NATIONAL Bank of Egypt (NBE), Egypt's premier financial institution for 98 years, has been a star performer in inspiring economic development.

NBE ranks top of Egyptian banks by figures, as the total balance sheet at the end of 1995 accounted for LE54.2 billion. Deposits scored a growth rate of 8.8 per cent, thus amounting to LE39.3 billion, while loans and investments reached LE29 billion.

In line with the emergence of trade groupings around the world, NBE has moved decisively towards the transition to universal banking with a view to keeping abreast with the rapid changes taking place at the domestic and international levels. NBE has been exerting major efforts to spur on the privatisation process and the money market which continue to look more promising.

In fact, NBE spearheads the Egyptian banking system in privatising joint and affiliated banks. The bank recently sold its share of equity participation in CIB, an unprecedented attempt to privatise a bank.

Inspired by a challenging spirit and an unyielding desire to boost the Egyptian capital market, NBE has listed 50 per cent of its stake in CIB (amounting to 20 per cent of CIB's total shares) on the London Stock Exchange in the form of GDRs valued at \$120 million. It is sufficient to say that the London Stock Exchange was chosen thanks to its long-standing international status and for being the main promoter of GDRs. Such an unprecedented stride has had positive repercussions as it reflects the soundness and high repute of Egyptian financial institutions.

The bank has also co-ordinated with other banks to offer a stake of the Suez Canal Co. valued at \$90 to \$110 million, in the form of GDRs and is in the process of offering another quota of its stake in the CIB in the London Stock Exchange.

Moreover, NBE is placing emphasis on extending non-traditional banking services in Egypt via affiliated companies covering the fields of cotton, tourism, real estate development, capital

venture brokerage, leasing and insurance services, in addition to financing consumer programmes.

In line with the bank's strategic objectives, NBE has given special momentum to financing infrastructure projects, mainly power stations, telecommunications, water stations and roads. Such projects are capable of alluring investments and preparing a suitable climate for the private sector. It is worth noting that NBE participates in 150 projects amounting to LE176 billion, in addition to managing syndicated loans and establishing domestic as well as joint mutual funds.

As far as the international marketing arena is concerned, NBE adopts a comprehensive export oriented programme through fostering the export of raw materials and intermediate goods on behalf of exporters. In addition to extending facilities to buyers of Egyptian exports, shouldering credit risks, covering the risks of exchange rates and interest fluctuation and inquiry about foreign importers, the bank also extends financial intermediary services, discounting and financing shipment and transportation. It did well to pinpoint that NBE finances about 30 per cent of Egypt's foreign trade.

NBE has also maintained its presence in the international arena through the National Bank of Egypt International Ltd, London, the representative office in Johannesburg, besides its extensive network of 1300 correspondents worldwide.

Such concerted efforts has placed NBE at the forefront of the Egyptian banking system and qualified it to rank no. 246 among the best 1000 banks worldwide according to The Banker's report for July 1996.

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Al-Ahram Weekly

The buck stops here

Hopes are high that the up-coming Cairo economic conference will yield tangible results in terms of expanding regional economic cooperation. Businessmen from around the world will, during the three-day conference, meet, discuss various business proposals and seek to make new in-roads into regional markets that to date have not been utilised to capacity.

Among the delegations attending is that of Israel, which, like its other regional and international counterparts, is intent on putting its best foot forward. In light of recent political tensions and the stalled peace process, this will be no easy task. The Helmon talks are again deadlocked — this time concerning the right of hot pursuit. The borders still remain closed to many Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. In short, tempers are running high and fuses, quite short.

In cases like this, politics and economics are rarely divorced from one another. Since his election last May, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly asserted that security must come before peace. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation is that peace must precede security, in order to ensure it. And only then, can full-fledged economic cooperation be pursued. A handshake between businessmen, or the signing of a lucrative contract is no where near enough to negate the feeling of betrayal and frustration resulting from months of Israeli political intransigence and nay-saying.

In the eyes of Egypt and the rest of the Arab world, this conference is merely an opportunity to further develop business contacts and establish new projects, and should not be viewed by Israel as a leveraging tool for the attempted establishment of a regional economic hegemony.

If Israel is as eager as it would have the world believe, that it would be a partner in the growing regional economy, then it must first be willing to sue up — by fulfilling its previous agreements, moving unconditionally ahead with the peace process, and not attempting to replace the land-for-peace principle for one that espouses markets-for-peace. No contract drawn up during this or any other economic conference will be able to wipe the slate clean of all the blood spilt over the years.

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Diversity and growth

Ibrahim Nafie
examines some of the projects that will be proposed at MENA III and finds that they are tailored to take Egypt confidently into the next century



unique opportunity to draw the attention of the international business community to the remarkable progress already achieved in economic reform, progress that has prepared the ground for future growth.

The documents Egypt will submit to the conference stress the fact that enduring regional cooperation will be possible only once conflict is ended, and in order to realise such cooperation Egypt is pursuing a comprehensive strategy, one element of which is the pursuit of political stability, requiring a comprehensive formula including the creation of an independent Palestinian state, complete Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanon and Syrian lands and the conclusion of agreements that will guarantee security to all. Egypt submitted a document to the Amman conference that contained several important principles in this regard, not least that balanced comprehensive development and economic parity were vital to the region.

Taking the Amman document as a guideline, Egypt has already participated in formulating a

number of new mechanisms to organise the process of economic cooperation in the region. These include new regional institutions such as the Middle East Bank, the Organisation of Tourism and the Organisation of Businessmen. It has also fostered numerous joint projects in the commercial and financial spheres.

The Egyptian government submitted 85 projects worth an estimated \$23 billion to the Amman conference. At the Cairo conference fewer proposals will be submitted — 52 projects worth \$16 billion. This reduction constitutes an attempt to give more space for the private sector to put forward projects furthering the development of the Egyptian economy. Preliminary reports suggest that the strategy has been successful with the private sector submitting 62 industrial projects with a total investment of \$9.8 billion, 18 projects for tourist development with a total investment of over \$8 billion, eight service sector projects, four agricultural, energy and housing projects and three marine projects.

The majority of these projects involve advanced

technologies, and therefore have additional spin-off benefits in terms of technological transfer. Infrastructure projects form a second focus of interest. In this area Egypt has proposed 14 communications and transportation projects worth an estimated \$2.9 billion, focusing primarily on developing road and transportation links with other North African countries but also involving the upgrading of domestic transportation networks.

Energy projects include establishing an electricity link between Egypt and Jordan, with similar projects being considered for North Africa, the Mediterranean basin and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. It has also been decided to establish a giant 600,000 kilowatt power station at Al-Nubariya.

Proposed agricultural projects aim both at increasing the productivity of land already under cultivation and bringing new lands under the plough, and include the establishment of a Cairo institute of genetic engineering. The implementation of the proposed agricultural projects should see Egypt make tremendous leaps in the field of bio-technology, a key area if agricultural development, produce diversification and productivity are to be improved.

The diversity of proposed projects bears witness to the fact that Egyptian planners are aware of the complex development processes needed to take Egypt confidently into the next century. They have focused on those sectors that will generate economic growth over the coming phase and which at the same time offer fertile ground for private investment, allowing the private sector to shoulder its burden of development costs.

In short, MENA III offers Egypt a unique opportunity which we can ill-afford not to exploit to the full. And if the future of Israel in the region is development upon general political agreements resulting in the implementation of regional economic projects the Arabs, before all others, must strive to put into place the frameworks that will guarantee the optimum returns for their people.

MENA II and peace

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the rationale of the economic conference, to be held in Cairo next week at a time the peace process is completely stalled

Now that Bill Clinton has been re-elected to a second — and last — term in office, it is to be hoped that his administration's Mideast policy will not continue to be shaped by the need to win the Jewish vote, and that a more balanced approach could create more favourable conditions for overcoming the severe crisis in which the peace process has been plunged since Netanyahu came to power. For it is hard to see how peace can be achieved in the context of the Israeli prime minister's insistence on replacing the 'land-for-peace' formula consensated by UN Resolution 242 by what he calls a 'peace-for-peace' tradeoff, that is, that does not entail the restoration of occupied Arab territories.

In making this preposterous offer, Netanyahu is banking on the idea that security concerns are high on the list not only of Israel's priorities, but also of those of all the other states in the region, and that Israel is in a position to extend many Arab regimes with services that can help allay those concerns, whether by providing them with intelligence support through the Mossad to counter the 'terrorist' threat they see as emanating from inside their own societies or economic support through mediating with international — including even Arab — financial circles. He hopes that in consideration for these services, the Arab regimes could be induced into accepting his version of peace as expressed in the slogan 'security-for-security', or 'peace-for-peace', instead of 'peace-for-land'.

In application of the 'peace-for-peace' formula, Netanyahu is calling for the invigoration of the mul-

tilateral track while obstructing the bilateral which deal with the restoration of occupied Arab territories. Hence his support for next week's Cairo economic conference even as he systematically undermines the implementation of the agreement previously signed by the state of Israel with the Palestinian Authority on re-deployment in Hebron. This raises the question of what, if anything, the Arabs can do on the eve of the conference to ensure that it does not end up serving Netanyahu's designs.

Netanyahu proceeds from the assumption that the Arab regimes are also interested in the convocation of the conference, which is in line with their current policies of encouraging privatisation, limiting the role of the state and enhancing the role of the market. However, what he fails to take into account is that these regimes cannot allow their adherence to the philosophy of a market economy to be used as justification to separate the bilateral from the multilateral track, and to build the normalisation of market relations throughout the Middle East in conditions where Israel's government openly declares that it will not restore Arab lands.

One way of avoiding this would be for the Arab parties to use the economic conference as a springboard for the promotion of a pan-Arab, rather than a Middle Eastern, market, in which the economic factor could be used as a means of putting pressure on Israel to abandon its 'peace-for-peace' formula in favour of the 'land for peace' principle. Under a Labour government, Israel was successful in di-

viding Arab ranks by dealing with each Arab party separately. Now that Netanyahu has managed to antagonise all the Arabs without exception, can this encourage them to rebuild their unity and solidarity as an essential condition for the peace process to move forward?

The economic conference could be a test of their readiness in this respect. So far, however, there are no indications of a common Arab stand even on the very principle of holding such a conference; some Arab countries, like Syria and Lebanon, have decided to boycott the conference, others have reluctantly agreed to take part, while even those which had gone far towards building bridges with Israel's previous Labour government believe they must distance themselves from a conference bringing them together with Netanyahu. How then, can a pan-Arab market be built?

It has been argued that Arab states were successful in convening an Arab summit thanks to Netanyahu's accession to power. But a summit differs from an economic conference in that in the former, decisions emanate from heads of state, while in the latter, no one individual is in control and decisions are to a great extent the result of the interplay of market forces.

President Mubarak has voiced the fear that the post-conference situation could appear to many of the participants as worse than the pre-conference situation. In the sense that instead of promoting healthy economic relations at the regional level, it could actually delay their establishment. The whole issue of proceeding with the conference at a time Netanyahu is pur-

suing a policy of obstructionism and brinkmanship is the subject of a heated debate, with those opposed to the conference arguing that its convocation in the name of stimulating economic activities could put the restoration of Occupied Territories even further out of reach, and its advocates arguing that postponing it in the name of putting pressure on Israel to restore Arab land could impede efforts for an economic takeoff.

Another argument in favour of holding the conference on schedule is that it can serve as a safety net against the danger of war breaking out, even by mistake. President Mubarak has warned that it is not in Israel's interest to use the threat of war, while presidents Arafat and Assad have spoken of the possibility of Israel resorting to war. According to the US administration, however, there are no signs of imminent hostilities between the two most likely candidates of a military clash, Israel and Syria.

President Mubarak defended the cause of peace by declining to take part in last month's Washington summit between Clinton, Netanyahu, Arafat and King Hussein, who has since admitted that the summit achieved no results whatsoever and that the Egyptian president was wise not to attend. Perhaps the time has come for a similar stand on the economic conference. Netanyahu has one week in which to prove that the bilateral track is still alive, and that he is prepared if not to take new steps towards solving the outstanding issues, at least, to implement the agreements already reached, like the one on Israeli redeployment in Hebron. But even that is unlikely.

Wahbi's sanctuary

By Naguib Mahfouz

Youssef Wahbi stood up for the dignity of the theatre at a time when public discipline and dignity were noticeably absent where the arts were concerned.



Youssef Wahbi single-handedly transformed the theatre into a sanctuary for culture and the arts by virtue of his total commitment. For example, if the curtain was to be raised at nine o'clock, it was out of the question for anyone, no matter how important, to be allowed into the auditorium to take his seat until the interval. Compare that to the way the public stroll into theatres today, 50 years later, at any time during a performance.

I remember once during a performance by Youssef Wahbi when a group of young people began nibbling melon seeds. Youssef Wahbi stopped the play and told the youths that anybody wanting to munch melon seeds or eat or drink anything, for that matter, should do so at the buffet, not in the playhouse. The theatre was like a school; eating and drinking in the classrooms were forbidden. The public applauded him warmly. Imagine talking to the public in the same terms today... I hear that in some theatres people eat sandwiches and drink fruit juice during the performance.

Another thing Youssef Wahbi insisted on was never changing a word of the text. We would go to performances of the same play and never once did an actor change a rhyme or witicism. The only troupe which did improvise was that of Ali El-Kassar, because he produced comedies that did not depend on literary texts, and even then there was only the addition of a word here or there. This never happened in Youssef Wahbi's productions, even in his comedies. Ramses Theatre was an altar to artistic dignity, from what was played to the audience's behaviour.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salimany.

The Press This Week

Al-Ahram: "People the world over build houses for others to live in, but in our country many build houses for others to die in. These criminals ignore construction codes in order to make illicit profit. Dozens of modern buildings have collapsed since the mid-1970s, killing hundreds and injuring thousands. At first we thought we were up against random accidents but it soon became clear that we were up against a general phenomenon — one which will continue unless there is a decisive stand against the crooked consciences of many of today's builders in Egypt." (Editorial, 30 October)

Al-Wafd: "The collapse of the 'cardboard' buildings is a collapse of the basic values and laws which govern our society. It is a glaring symptom of the chaos and degeneracy that abound today. The pillars of Egyptian society are being eaten away in the same way as those of the Heliopolis building and others which have fallen like autumn leaves. The only way out is a decisive confrontation with the circles of corruption. Otherwise the pillars of society will come crashing down on our heads." (Gamal Badawi, 31 October)

Rose El-Youssefi: "Do we really need more laws to avoid disaster resulting from corruption or negligence? And are laws by themselves sufficient? The truth is, no. We have enough laws to administer the globe, let alone one country. The problem is not laws or how stiff the penalties are. The problem is that we face a society which thinks that laws are only for the weak. Nothing can be achieved without dealing with this problem." (Mahmoud El-Tohami, 4 November)

Al-Arabi: "Every student of law knows that the worst laws and the ones most difficult to enforce are those that come as an angry reaction to some event. Laws should never be a hasty reaction to disaster. Those who have allowed building violations to go on for years without doing anything about them could have waited a week or two for the new law to take its natural course, with the help of experts, before being promulgated." (Diaaeddin Dawood, 4 November)

Al-Shaab: "The real criminal behind the collapse of the Roxy building on the heads of its innocent tenants is the administrative machinery in Egypt. If we are serious about preserving the lives of people and their interests, the state should enforce the removal of building violations immediately. And if new legislation is needed, the government can issue them in minutes. Precedents abound, although only

when the new legislation is to the government's liking." (Talaat Romieh, 1 November)

Al-Ahali: "Once again voices have been raised calling for stiffer penalties against building violations. Then tomorrow or the day after we will forget about the whole thing and the violations continue. The government's efforts to bring order have become mere ink on paper and this curious state of affairs continues. The state has lost its prestige and the ability to enforce the law on everyone — the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor. The building violations are just one glaring example." (Luigi Waked, 30 October)

Al-Akhabar: "Every time a building collapses, claiming tens of victims, we react angrily and ask hundreds of questions without getting any clear and decisive answers. Then we quickly calm down and forget everything until the catastrophe recurs! After the collapse of the Heliopolis building people once again asked: who is responsible? The owner of the building? The consulting engineers? The engineer in charge? The corruption of municipal councils? Or is it all of them? I think the responsibility for all the catastrophes that have happened and those likely to happen rests with the tattered laws that allow for fraud and violations and which have thrown the door wide open for bribery and corruption." (Said Sanab, 30 October)

Al-Gomhuria: "Until when are we to remain spectators every time a catastrophe happens, waiting for the enforcement of obsolete laws which cannot deter and prevent the crime? There is no alternative but to introduce speedy and radical changes to 'local administration' whose employees have shown themselves to have no consciences and who have sold their souls for the cheapest of prices." (Samir Ragab, 29 October)

Al-Ahram: "It is high time that we confront fraud, greed, negligence and bribery with harsh penalties as each is a crime which can claim lives. The word 'reconciliation' (with the authorities) should have had no place in our vocabulary. What is the meaning of a building owner, driven by greed, committing violations and reaping millions of pounds only to pay a fine of a few thousand pounds? The 'reconciliation fine' has made violations the rule rather than the exception." (Hassan El-Astikawli, 4 November)

Compiled by Hala Saqr



From the time he was governor of the New Valley, the career of the Egyptian Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri, has been characterised by strenuous attempts to reduce the bureaucratic hurdles that had inhibited economic performance. Such was his mandate when he was appointed prime minister. And underlying the expression in his depiction of the prime minister there is, I think, a degree of optimism, concentrated here in his smile, as he anticipates the benefits that are expected to accrue from the economic reform programme and the many difficult decisions it has involved.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

As the Nile disappears

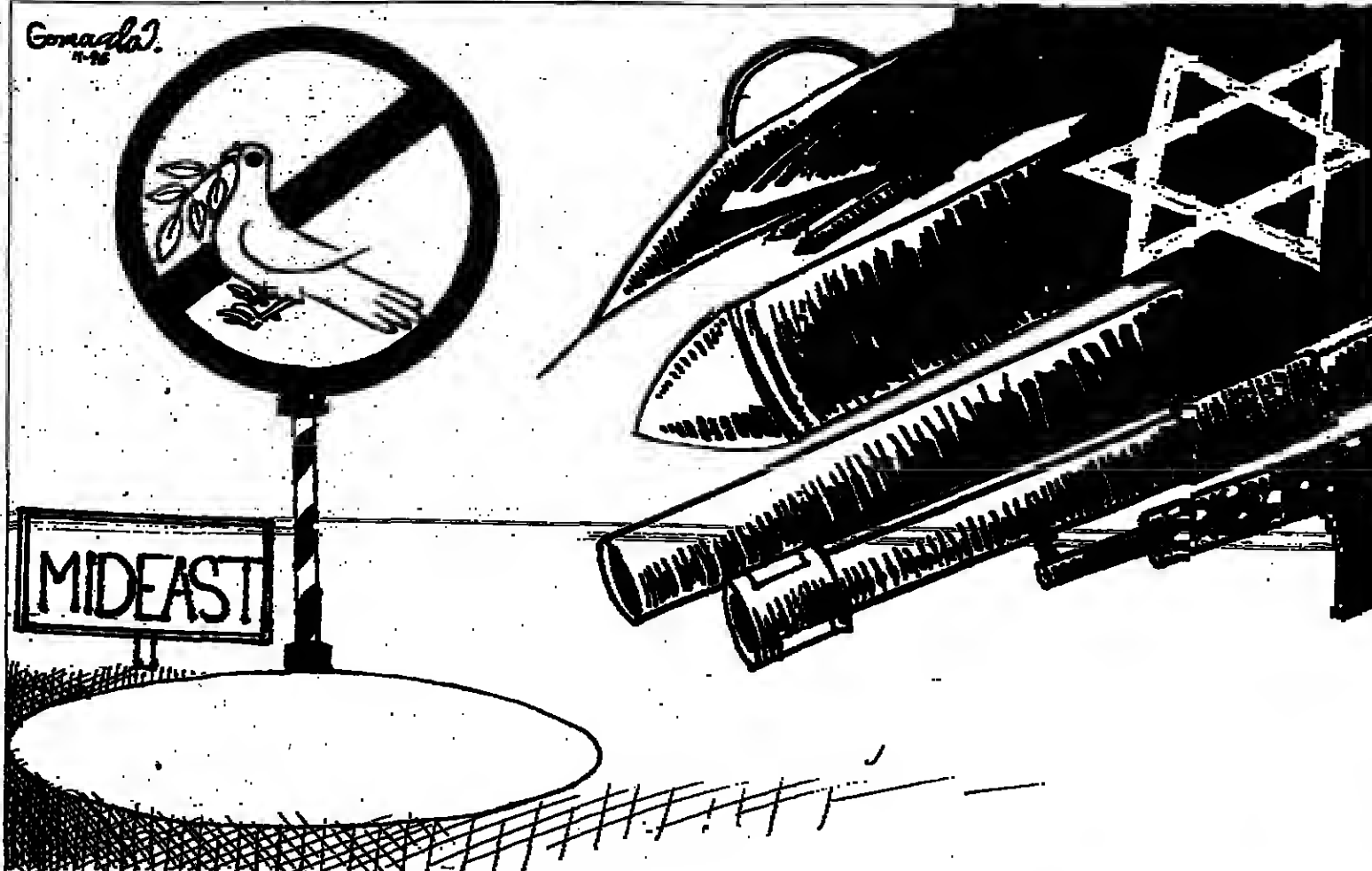
If you were able to approach the Qasr El-Nil area on a stifling hot summer's night, and tried to contemplate the view, the mass of humanity crowding both banks of the river near the Qasr El-Nil Bridge might cause you to think you were witnessing the Day of Resurrection. The surface of the river becomes invisible and the landmarks of the bridges and the Corniche disappear under the people swarming into the streets for relief from the heat like bees around a honeycomb.

In this case, the honeycomb is a small opening on the Corniche, no more than a few dozen metres wide, behind Al-Andalus Gardens. A year ago, the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources wrested this bit of land from the fangs of the unauthorised and unplanned activities which were building concrete buildings in the river under various names and in contravention of every regulation.

What with clubs for officers, police, engineers, businessmen, lawyers and journalists — among others — not to mention the nightclubs and theatres, hotels (floating or not), restaurants and cabarets that have all been firmly anchored by or in the Nile, taking over the river banks and the pavements of adjoining streets, the river has been effectively placed under lock and key. There is an impenetrable barrier between the river and the millions of people who work to the point of exhaustion every day, yet do not own chalets and villas on the northern coast, nor, for that matter, are they members of these luxurious clubs. Their only pleasure during the summer is to enjoy the cool evening breezes for a few short hours.

The banks of the river anywhere in Greater Cairo have been taken over or built up, whether by the new industrial pressure groups, businessmen and itinerant vendors of tea and cold drinks, or drug pushers and their clientele. Even that tiny strip by the Al-Andalus Gardens which the minister of irrigation called the New Corniche has become a mooring site for Nile boats, decked out with light bulbs or not.

Nowhere in the world has a river been so deprived of its banks; nowhere have so many encroachments been made with such impunity, all for the benefit of the wealthy and influential classes without regard for the other social sectors. The state has colluded in this crime by neglecting to protect the river, by according building licenses and remaining silent over violations year after year, until one would expect the very river to rise and revolt against the invasion. An uprising was possible in the days before the flood was fettered by dams, sluices and barges. But the Nile, harassed and boxed in, has grown old and stagnant. Only a miracle can save it.



Intellectuals and the crisis

Commenting on the current debate on the boycott of Israel, **Edward Said**, in this second of his two-part series, argues that intellectuals must act as voices of conscience and challenge, rather than as petitioners or supplicants

During the consternation caused in Arab and Palestinian ranks by Benjamin Netanyahu's actions over the past few weeks, one heard a chorus of cries of regret over the Labour Party's disappearance from power. In addition, as I mentioned in my last article, the chorus has been that we should return to Oslo, as if Oslo, with all the ambiguities and unfavourable clauses, was not in fact the problem exploited by Netanyahu to squeeze, torment and otherwise make life miserable for Palestinians.

Far from being solutions for or escapes from the impasse, these attempts to turn history back to some idyllic period when all things seemed rosy and invitingly possible strike me as dangerous illusions. We now know too much about Shimon Peres' actions since 1992 to accept the notion that as prime minister he was a man of peace in the real sense of the word. Everything he did vis-à-vis the Palestinians, and Yasser Arafat in particular, suggests that the continuity between the historical attitudes of Labour Zionism towards Palestinians — their rights and permissible aspirations (Ben-Gurion referred to the Arabs as Red Indians), and Peres' policies was carefully maintained.

True, Peres is a past master of *hasbara* — the art of disseminating information for the *goyim* — and he is a skilful manipulator of television, so that he can always appear statesmanlike and visionary; nevertheless, most of what he did was to extract concessions from the Palestinians, allowing them very little in return, according to a rigorous ideological programme whereby they would always remain a subordinate people.

Given these realities, it would seem to me inappropriate, to say the least, to consider the Israeli Labour Party and its leadership (even members of Meretz) to be the prime lobby for peace inside Israel. This, of course, has been Arab and PLO policy since 1991, and even before. In his recent article (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, issue 296) analysing the discussion of normalisation in Egypt and elsewhere, Gamil Mattar is absolutely right to say that all through the 1970s and 1980s Arab intellectuals were enjoined by their governments to enter discussions with Israeli and American intellectuals, functionaries, and politicians in the misguided hope that these meetings would convince Israel and its supporters that the Arabs were indeed ready for peace. All that happened was that Israeli positions hardened, and more demands were made on the Arabs.

I recall that during the mid-'80s I was persuaded to meet a well-known Labour Party activist with a very famous name. "Give us your acceptance of Resolution 242 and the sky's the limit: we can do amazing things in return," I was told. "But we need to be assured that you are seriously interested in peace." In 1988 the PNC produced its recognition of 242, and nothing very much happened to improve the Israeli position. It struck me, then as now, that Arab, and especially Palestinian, positions were always guided by the pre-emptive not of Palestinian dispossession but of Israeli psychology, as if having one of the most powerful armies in the world, a nuclear arsenal, and the full unconditional backing of the US was insufficient to ally Israeli anxieties. There was always another hurdle for us to jump, one more insecurity to address, still more fears to assuage — the list kept getting longer. Some-

how, it did not seem appropriate to think about our insecurities, or our fears; theirs were always the urgent, more important ones, whereas ours were just left there unattended.

This extraordinary self-forgetfulness on our part was and remains a legacy of the colonial era, when it was assumed that natives were to be addressed by the master, used, employed and exploited with scant regard for their concerns. There is also the added complication that our interlocutors were Jews who were at the same time survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, as well as colonists who used the strategies and tactics of colonialists in other parts of Africa and Asia.

No one, to my knowledge, has had to deal with such a complication anywhere else in the world where white colonialists were wresting control of land and resources from native peoples. In addition, Zionism's authentically idealistic component so far as only Jews were concerned — which argued the world over that Jews were coming to Palestine in order to be reborn as a nation after centuries of unique ordeal — swayed public opinion, as well as the policies of Western governments whose guilt at doing very little to assist Jews during the Holocaust made them compensate (relatively inexpensively) in the present for their costly sins in the past.

As a result, Palestinian voices were simply unheard, and in very little time Israel became central to the ideology of European and American liberalism. The main beneficiary of this was, of course, the Labour Party, a full member of the Socialist International, and to all intents and purposes a representative of progressive causes in the Middle East and elsewhere. Little attention was paid to its aggressive wars, its disgracefully racist policies towards its Arab population or, since 1967, its brutal colonial policies, including massive settlements, collective punishments, annexation, and attacks against its neighbours. Labour was supposed to be tough, yes, but it was also believed to be rhetorically ready to be as forthcoming and as conciliatory as, inversely, the Arabs were not.

Outside the Labour Party, most Arab governments and their intellectuals perceived only the religious and political extremists associated with the Likud: Gush Emunim, Rabbi Kahane and the other ideological zealots. Until about 1990 knowledge and analysis of Israel and the United States in the Arab world was both superficial and incomplete: even the tiny number of specialised institutes and individuals had very small audiences and, in the absence of free discussion and debate, a general current was maintained in which Israel was an enemy and its existence — despite Camp David — publicly denied, or ignored.

So the various meetings, seminars and debates that took place as Gamil Mattar has described them in effect cloistered away from the scrutiny of most people. They did not seem to be coordinated, nor in the end were they useful to the Arabs, except, interestingly enough, as a way of surreptitiously getting closer to the Israeli power centre. What policy-makers had in mind was not made clear and, in my own case as a member of several discussion groups between Israelis, influential and (we thought at the time) well-meaning American Jews, and a small handful of Palestinian in-

tellectuals, I never felt that what we were doing was understood or properly assessed by the PLO. I was partly wrong of course, since behind our backs a whole programme of cooperation, based on Palestinian concessions, was being set up: this led directly to Oslo.

Two important points need to be made about the present dilemma. One concerns the situation inside Israel, how it is read and interpreted. The other concerns the role of the Arab intellectual, with which I would like to deal first. There are two clear options here (actually they are not so clear in real life, but for the purposes of analysis they can be construed as clear). One is to maintain a position of total independence and say that one is going to talk about and act in a situation that directly confronts both Arab and Israeli political power, refusing to accept either one as defining one's role. Yet Mohamed Sid-Ahmed said in his article (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, issue 297) about the debate over the current crisis that politics for politicians and their associated intellectuals is pragmatic and the art of the possible; in that case, you act as an intellectual whose purpose is to advance various interests, to influence and be involved in policy.

I myself think that is a disastrous course: it has brought us to a situation where our values or principles are maintained, since being effective, influential, mainstream and acceptable are the main criteria for action, with the further consequence that the intellectual is guided not by his/her sense of the truth of the situation, but by considerations of "the possible." Too often this has meant internalising the norms of power, not those of genuine reflection and analysis, which answer, in my opinion, to more permanent, long-term considerations not immediately tied to implementation or to advancing policies and interests in the realm of the possible.

In the Arab world we have had too much of the former, far too little of the latter. More's the pity, since being far less powerful than either Israel or the US — not only militarily, but also culturally and institutionally — we inevitably end up playing according to their agendas, as the last few years so shabbily attest.

The independent intellectual, I think, would therefore regard the impasse of today as an aspect of the larger problem, which is that Israeli society has maintained a rigorous denial of its own past towards the Palestinians in particular, and the Arabs generally. We have not made our voices heard inside Israeli society, that is, from a position that gets us attention as voices of conscience and challenge, rather than as petitioners or supplicants. Total refusal of what is now called "normalisation" strikes me as unsuitable and inattentive to important currents within Israeli culture, currents that need to be supported, addressed, engaged. Why should critical voices like those of Israel Shahak be ignored just because they are not attached to power or because we have a policy of not talking to Israelis under any circumstances?

I do not think it is reasonable to expect Israelis to apologise in advance of a discussion for what Israel has done to Arabs and Palestinians, although it is, I think, possible to choose one's interlocutors and audi-

Soapbox

Banking on prosperity

MENA III, by seeking to utilise all the resources of the region within the framework of peace, aims at boosting the peace process on all tracks. Economic cooperation is, after all, a necessary dividend of peace.

Though the concept of a Middle East market has been around for some time it was not until the boycott of Israel had been lifted — i.e. after the signing of the self-rule accord — that any progress could be made towards that goal.

The Middle East market, certainly as outlined by former Israeli Prime Minister Peres, is conceived to embrace all countries in the region, including Iran, Turkey, Israel and Ethiopia. It is an attempt to fashion an economic bloc along the lines of NAFTA, the European Common Market and similar Asian groupings.

The fundamental principles of the proposed economic grouping will include the free movement of capital, labour and of persons, freedom of movement, of transit, and equal access to transportation and communication networks.

The proposed Middle Eastern bloc will cover 11 per cent of the total area of the world and contain 349 million inhabitants, about 5 per cent of the world's population. In terms of resources it would command 25 per cent of the world's production of oil and 62 percent of its reserves.

The private sector is playing an important role in financing cooperation within the region and certainly during MENA III we can expect Egyptian banks to assume a leading role. They will present any number of industrial projects to potential investors and will be instrumental in generating the necessary commercial activity that will lead to enhanced economic growth.

Egyptian banks are fundamental to the promotion of regional development. Banque Misr in particular, will propose numerous and varied economic projects in every field of economic activity.

This week's Soapbox speaker is chairman of the board of Misr Bank.



Essam El-Din El-Ahmedi

Putting the cart before the horse

Holding a regional economic conference at this juncture is tantamount to rewarding Israel for stalling and reneging on agreements, argues **Gouda Abdel-Khaleq**

The countdown to the Economic Conference for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), to be held from 12 to 14 November, has already begun. The conference organisers were careful to pick a flashy slogan: Building for the Future. Whether slogans can really turn things around and make the event a success is doubtful, however. It takes much more than slogans to achieve genuine and long-lasting economic cooperation in this part of the world. Foremost is reaching a just and comprehensive settlement between the Arabs and Israel, based on the land-for-peace principle. After all, this was the guiding principle to which all parties to the conflict, Israel included, committed themselves at the Madrid conference.

Let us remember that the core of a just and comprehensive settlement is the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel should also give up the Arab lands it occupies in the Golan and South Lebanon. In addition, the right of the Palestinians expelled from their lands to return or receive fair compensation should be recognised by Israel. A settlement on any other terms can only lead to a Carthaginian peace, and history tells us that these arrangements are always unstable.

Israel, particularly under the newly elected Likud government, seems to be looking for a settlement which will allow it both to keep occupied Arab lands and to engage in normal relations with the Arabs. If one is interested in "building for the future," a solid foundation should be in place first. In plain terms, the solid foundation is a political settlement that guarantees a just and durable

peace in the region. Anything short of that is simply a recipe for disaster.

A carrot-and-stick approach may be the best way to encourage the Israeli government to take enough steps in the direction of just and durable peace. Israel has a big stake in normalising relations with the Arabs. This is frequently referred to as the peace dividend: open borders for trade and investment, infrastructure projects, cooperation in areas of energy and environment, etc. Because Israel is short on many vital resources and has only a limited market, its potential benefits from normalisation of relations with the Arabs are far greater than any benefits accruing to us. That is the carrot. The stick is to withhold any normalisation of relation until a just and comprehensive political settlement is reached.

Schemes for so-called regional cooperation could conform to the old adage "one man's meat is another's poison." Israel has proposed projects for regional cooperation in transportation which include railways, land routes and pipelines. A railway project involves connecting the Israeli railway network, which ends in the south at Mt Zin Phosphate Terminal, to Eilat and Aqaba on the Red Sea, with possibility of extending the southern base of the network to include part of Saudi Arabia. This would establish a railway network between the Mediterranean (Ashdod) and the Red Sea ports belonging to a regional railway system, and would support land routes between Israel and the Gulf and East Asia. No mental gymnastics are necessary to realise that such projects

represent a direct threat to the position of the Suez Canal as an international trade artery. Add to this the proposed oil-and-gas pipeline links from the Gulf to the Mediterranean via Israeli ports. All this will take place at the direct expense of the Suez Canal and the Samed pipeline.

These examples are evidently apposite illustrations of the adage mentioned above. Holding the Cairo economic conference in these circumstances amounts to rewarding Israel for stalling and reneging on the agreements which it has already signed. This can only encourage more Israeli intransigence, and does not serve the cause of peace and stability in this part of the world.

It should be remembered that the Arab economic boycott of Israel proved very effective in the past; it deprived the Israeli economy from expanding to its full potential by denying it both resources and markets. As a consequence, Israel was forced to live off external resources provided by Zionist organisations and friendly governments, mainly the United States. Now the United States is facing long-term economic decline, and will definitely cut down foreign aid. To substitute for reduced aid, Israel has to attract foreign investment. But that requires stability and normal economic relations in the Middle East. The lifting of the boycott will thus enable the Israeli economy to replace aid with foreign investment.

It is clear that Israel has strategic interests in lifting the Arab boycott — or what remains of it. The Arabs, on the other hand, have strategic interests in maintaining and vigorously enforcing

their boycott of Israel until a just and comprehensive settlement is reached. Strategic Arab interests will be seriously threatened by the convention in Cairo of the economic conference notwithstanding Israeli intransigence. The argument that the conference involves economic issues that must be separated from politics does not have a leg to stand on. For one, the two types of issues, that is the political and the economic, cannot be separated. For another, the United States always links the two, as demonstrated in its attitude towards China, Vietnam, Iraq, Libya and Cuba, just to pick a short list.

If one takes the slogan of the Cairo economic conference (Building for the Future) seriously, then a solid foundation should be laid down. An important prerequisite for that is mutual trust, which is absolutely lacking. We mentioned Israel's stalling tactics. We may add that Israel has adamantly refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Nor has it been forthcoming on the issue of Egyptian war captives who were murdered by the Israelis in cold blood.

Under these circumstances, normalisation of economic relations between the Arabs and Israel, through such mechanisms as regional economic conferences, is tantamount to giving Israel control over Arab resources to endanger Arab interests. If only in self-defence, the Arabs should make it impossible for Israel to eat its cake and have it, too.

The writer is a professor of economics at Cairo University.

Nehad Selaiha watches a new dance theatre troupe try out their wings at Al-Hanager



Out of the cocoon

After three years as lead dancer with Walid Aouni's Cairo Opera Modern Dance Theatre Company, Karim El-Tonsi decided it was time to cut loose. Working with Aouni has been a valuable experience, he admits, contributing a great deal to the development of his technical skills as a dancer. But there comes a time when one needs to cut the umbilical cord, define one's own views and attitudes, and pursue one's own dreams, or nightmares.

The idea of setting up his own dance theatre company had been haunting El-Tonsi for some time before he spelled it out to Al-Hanager's director Hoda Wasfi. At the time he was still with the Opera Modern Dance company, rehearsing Aouni's *Last Interview* in which Nancy El-Tonsi, his sister, was starring as the Egyptian painter, Taha Hana, on whose life the work is based. Inevitably this created tensions and divided loyalties. But not for long. Once Wasfi gave the green light, and the company began, things seemed to square themselves nicely. By August Nancy El-Tonsi was dividing her time between *Interview* and her brother's *Al-Radwa* (Contentment), and the production premiered in September, but since it played on the fringe, and only for one night, at 11 pm, very few people got to watch it. Whether Aouni was there that night to celebrate the official 'coming out' of his prize student as choreographer, I do not know; but last Saturday when *Al-Radwa* started a three night run at Al-Hanager, before moving to other sites, I found him hugging everybody after the performance. The Tonsis had not disappointed him, nor me, for all it is worth.

Like Aouni, El-Tonsi uses movement and dance as vehicles for self-exploration, and comes up with highly subjective imaginative constructions that have a kind of personal urgency and are imbued with the unsettling anxiety of a vaguely perceived and dimly understood dream. The movement patterns and sequences are wavering and exploratory rather than definitive, and though the composition as a whole openly draws on the vernacular kinetic vocabulary of indigenous rituals (which explains the relative absence of straight lines and flowy movements and the abundance of circles, ripples, swirls and spirals), its attitude to these rituals and practices remains teasingly prevaricating and ambivalent.

The ambivalence is structured into the piece, or, rather, is the structural principle which organises the varied folkloric material into a developing pattern of parallels and counterpoints, and informs it with dramatic tension and irony. It even informs the costume design (which in the case of the female dancers suggests a modern woman's salopette and the traditional costume of the harem's odalisques, and in the case of the derwish both a wizard and an angel) and also controls the simple design of the set — a huge mirror giving us a back view of the stage, splitting the same, as it were, into two simultaneous contrasting scenes. In the absence of a narrative line the sequences of images are linked through a central theme: a spiritual search for peace, harmony and faith, and the unity of body, mind and soul. At the beginning, we dimly glimpse, in a kind of soft-focus blur, a mass of writhing human bodies inside what looks like a cylindrical gauze co-

coon descending from the flies. The performance space is lined with candles of varying sizes, small ones at the front and bigger ones at the back while a strong smell of incense wafts from the stage into the auditorium. Gradually, the human figures detach themselves from the mass, one by one, break through the cocoon and slump down on the stage floor, forming a swirling wave of bodies that slowly creeps towards us. The lighting keeps the bodies disturbingly dim while highlighting the outstretched arms and imploring hands. When five of the seven dancers have emerged, we can clearly see two figures — a female and a hooded male, dressed in the flowing robes of a derwish, a pagan priest or a spiritual healer, locked in mortal combat. The music (emphatic, arresting, and somehow calculatingly cacophonous) orchestrates the mounting tension, bringing it to a frenzied climax of unbearable pitch at the moment the woman breaks free from the clutches of the derwish to join the others outside the cocoon.

The derwish, however, is at her heels, and in the scenes that follow he becomes alternately the focus of aspiration for this group of lost souls who are looking for a saviour, and a sleek, sly devil that leads them into frenzied, orgiastic ceremonies that make them slaves to his will. Frequently, the five female dancers, led by Nancy El-Tonsi and Nancy Adham, vividly recall the old Greek bacchae, and Karim El-Tonsi's music collage, carefully picked out from many stirring sources, confirms this impression. But against the Dionysian principle of chaos, spontaneity and irrationality represented by the female dancers, the show pits the

Apollonian principle of order and rationality and embodies it in the only male figure among the fugitives from the cocoon. This male figure, played by Karim El-Tonsi, engages the sensual derwish (played by Hamdi El-Arabi) in battle, but the conflict remains unresolved. At the end of the battle the derwish, ravenous music with its maddening pagan beat stops, and the dancers who had fallen to the floor in an agony of feverish, delirious writhing become suddenly still. On one of the two nights I was there this sudden pause was greeted with huge applause from the auditorium. It was a pity, since it spoiled the effect of the eloquent closing sequence. As we savour the silence, welcome relief after all the derwish music and ear beats, the characters, including the derwish now dressed of his garment, sit up slowly and look around them in wonder, like people waking from a nightmare; then they begin to creep slowly towards each other and huddle together in awed silence, forming a beautiful tableau vivant. At this moment *Al-Radwa* seems to strip its synopsis as printed in the programme. To me, it seemed to leave the simple critique of rituals, spiritual sedatives and superstitions far behind and to say that the spiritual thirst and search will just go on, just as the conflict between the Dionysian and the Apollonian impulses in all of us will. If we must look for comfort, it seemed to add, we can only find it in human solidarity.

Al-Radwa will speak to different people differently. One thing, however, will be unanimously acknowledged: that Karim El-Tonsi has proved a genuinely talented, intellectually serious, and highly promising choreographer.

Music

Cairo Symphony Orchestra;
Ahmed El-Saedi, conductor;
Boris Petruschansky, piano;
Main Hall, Cairo Opera House, 26 Oct

Throughout this concert we shied with heavy weights over thin ice and despite flaws in the surface, there were no breaks. Presenting musical largesse is a dangerous business. High wide and handsome is an invitation to trouble. But it never came, if only because the conductor is familiar with the landscape. The concert actually opened with the conductor's own small scale composition, which he calls *miniatures*. His music does not stay long. It quickly moves off into other areas. Music travel light by the means of transport, the destination is immaterial. It is what you see in passing that matters. He suggests place — unpleasant places — impressionistically, but never people. Maybe he will grow into people, but for now he sticks to objects.

A bit of splendour

David Blake receives news from the fronts

And onto Brahms, whose piano music remains an unsolved mystery. There is a lot of it, impromptus, sonatas, variations which cascade like peacock feathers, Scots ballads that break the heart. Yet the man is not behind this music as Beethoven is behind his. Brahms was a social mystery. Maybe Hamburg gave him a marine flair for metamorphosis. The first piano concerto is one of his two great sleights of hand and personality. It moves with fiddish speed through heights and depths and then invests itself behind shrouds and veils of poetic evasions, shimmering out between life and death. Boris Petruschansky was a pupil of Heinrich Neuhaus and has played with conductors like Isa Solomon and Gergiev. It was marvellous that he should play

the Brahms concerto on this visit. He gave a straightforward performance. Useless to detail the marvels of the first movement. The drama of the cruel slicing up of the keyboard was achieved without effort. The muscular thrusts still remained beneath the music but these were over brash or shallow. Like Schnabel he just sits at the piano while thunder and brimstone whirled around him. Colourful singing sounds are let loose, and there is nothing gory as is so often the case. The orchestra chases breathlessly after this man whose fire and speed seem to ignite the keyboard. In the second movement Brahms is more slylyline. The sounds and arches of the notes whisper as they turn into monolithic arches of sound. It takes courage not to try to interpret all this but to let it speak for itself.

He did the long, low hushed chords at the end of the movement with total commitment. The last movement always seems bare but it does grow, eventually becoming an epiphany. The pianist let himself go, and the notes flew, far from ordinary life where it is dangerous but rewarding. Brahms, of course, can be colossal. Everything comes out of his crucible — rage, gutter, life — all transformed with a new glimmer by Petruschansky. Coming after Brahms Bruckner's fourth symphony, the Roman, seemed teeny. Like Mahler's fourth the word Romantic sits uneasily upon it. Is Bruckner trying his wings? The symphony does take off. It flies. But in this peculiar form of Bruckner's build up, from pianissimo nothing to fortissimo hullabaloo which always fail

to burst, there is little feeling of romance. The orchestra, which had done well in the Brahms, seemed listless in this Bruckner. The horns were confident throughout and the strings in the second movement provided the sort of pillow that Bruckner demands. In the third movement comes what is called the 'hum', a tapestry that betrays ghosts not people. Everything bounds towards a tremendous climax, then a gasp — nothing. Maybe something romantic will come in the next movement which is long, and suddenly ends in fresh leader sounds, almost Schubertian. Things are beginning to move. It is like news from the front. How many missing? Bruckner was a hard master. One must ponder politely in the last section of this symphony. Someone has died. El-Saedi does his best with the juxtapositions. Really, though, Bruckner maybe pots. Get comfortable, the end is in sight.

Art

The work of Aziz El-Hihi, a Moroccan artist resident in Switzerland, is currently showing at the Mashrabiya Gallery. It is the first time he has exhibited in Egypt — indeed, glancing at his curriculum vitae, it appears to be only his second exhibition in an Arab country. What he shows is a series of troll like creatures, with curiously enlarged heads and occasionally bloated bodies. They are completed in a variety of media.

There is something vaguely familiar about these creatures. The round heads are flat, the features reduced to the essentials, eyes, nose, mouth — are described in lines, sometimes incised through the surface of the paint, sometimes painted on. The round bodies are just as schematised, with incisions or painted lines standing in for fingers or toes. One particularly beautiful creature carries three miniature versions of itself in a kind of triple pouch, slung around its middle. Sometimes, of course, there is a vague air of malevolence, but how could there not be with such strange, childlike creatures about. Impassive, with doll-like inscrutability, they are the outines that chil-

The beastly baby

Knowingly naive, and splashing about. Nigel Ryan on some unpleasant archetypes

Children adopt when representing people — a hole for the mouth, holes for the eyes. But they are far from being faux naive. Innocence, even a stab at innocence, is marked by its absence. We are left with something far more contrived than simple doodles: bland, in the way that babies are bland, obscene in the way that only children can be obscene, knowing all about everything, without question, and completed — at least as far as the larger works go — in a range of finishes, from the distressed to the frighteningly smooth. El-Hihi's creatures can do things. They can do coy, with incised eye lashes and hand held in half bearded protest. They can do too — a scarlet baby against a green backdrop. Sometimes the hands are more substantial, floppy and iridescent, like dead crows. There are smaller pieces, colour washes, outlined after the

dripping, splashes for eyes, smudges for bodies, lent definition by a line of black. These do even more things. They sit, or crouch, or hug themselves. They are uncomfortable things to view. And it is this that you take away from the exhibition, a feeling of discomfort. What is merely cute becomes merely sinister. There is no politeness for the holes, no salve for the viewers of these placid grotesques. It could all be rather maudlin were it not for the fact that the painter himself is so patently engaged. He is sincere in his scratching and — here we move into dangerous territory — sincere in his naïveté. Splash, scrape, dribble, splat.

I am reminded of Edward Cory's tale of *The Beastly Baby*, the story of an unfortunate young couple who, in the most ghastly infant imaginable. Leave baby in the sitting room and it kills the cat, reduces the upholstery to shreds, kicks the table over and mauls the guests. And it grew

and it grew and it grew. At their wits end, the parents of the beastly baby would leave sharp implements lying about but the infant simply used these to inflict further damage. In desperation they would place phials of acid within reach, but baby just poured them on the rugs, burning holes and smiling sweetly. They attended public meetings with their child and tried to leave it behind but some officious attendant would alaciously notice it and chase after the parents. On holiday at the seaside they floated it out to sea in a rubber ring and the tide would bring it back. Finally, they abandoned the monstrous child on a mountain ledge, where it was picked up by a huge black bird. Before the unfortunate couple had trekked to the foothills the sky went dark and they heard a loud, damp bang. The talons of the bird had pierced the child and at last the beastly baby was undone. In the Mashrabiya, though, he is alive and kicking. The beastly baby is as beastly as ever.

Aziz El-Hihi, *Mashrabiya Gallery*. For full details, see listings



Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Aziz El-Hihi
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8, Champollion St., Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm. Tel 778 623. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm. See review, opposite

One Hundred Years of Radio
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 10 Nov.

André Malraux Exhibition
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis area, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St., Imbabia St., Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. Until 11 Nov.

To mark the 20th anniversary of Malraux's death, an exhibition, daily films and a varied lecture programme (contact venue for details).

Group Exhibition
Doria Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gharib St., across Mohamed Mahmoud St., Bob El-Louk. Tel 335 657. Daily except Fri, 12pm-5pm. Until 14 Nov.

Popular Crafts
Plot 1, Heliopolis. A Mohamed Abul-Oyoun St. off El-Makham, Heliopolis. Tel 248 0082. Daily 11am-9pm. Until 15 Nov. An exhibition of popular crafts including brasswork, rugs and silversmithing, pottery, antiques and leather products.

Indian Photographs
Fawaz Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Dokki. Tel 337 5436. Daily 10am-6pm. Until 15 Nov. Photographs from India, staged as part of the Indian Cultural Festival.

Barry Iversen
Cairo-Sheria Gallery, 17 Youssif El-Ghazali St., Downtown. Tel 393 1704. Daily except Sun, 12pm-6pm. Until 16 Nov.

Time magazine photo-correspondent for the Middle East, Barry Iversen, displays works which capture both a love of the desert and of large format black and white photography.

Gamal El-Sagheer (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Makham St., Zamil. Tel 340 6264. Daily except Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 22 Nov.

Farid Fadel
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 23 Nov.

The Court Photography of Riad Chahata. Sory Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Dokki. Tel 337 5436. Daily 10am-6pm. Until 27 Nov.

Exhibition of photographs taken by the artist, Farid Fadel, during his stay in Egypt, including an impressive portrait of Ismail and a picture of Prince Farouk, Egypt's supreme boy scout, with much in between.

The 7th Student Art Exhibition
Fawaz Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Dokki. Tel 337 5436. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm. Until 28 Nov.

An exhibition featuring paintings and drawings executed by AUC art students during the academic year 1995-96.

Antiques in Egyptian Art
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, corner of El-Sheikh Bisham and Mousa St., Downtown. Tel 337 5436. Daily except Fri 10.30am-7pm; Thur 10.30am-3pm & Sat 12pm-5pm. Until 30 Dec.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm. Until 31 Dec.

Egypt's largest collection of 19th-century European art, amassed by the late Mohamed Mahmoud, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khedive and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared.

Egyptian Museum
Tel 575 5333. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm; Fri 10am-1pm. Tel 575 5333. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm; Fri 10am-1pm.

The world's largest collection of Ptolemaic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians along with, of course, the controversial mummies room.

Coptic Museum
Mohamed El-Dokki. Tel 362 8766. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm; Fri 10am-1pm. Tel 362 8766. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm; Fri 10am-1pm.

Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St., Al-Makham St., Bob El-Louk. Tel 390 9970/9971. 1520. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm; Fri 10am-1pm. Tel 390 9970/9971. 1520. Daily except Fri, 10am-6pm; Fri 10am-1pm.

A vast collection of Islamic art and crafts including mahabbaya, lustreware, ceramics, textiles, woodwork and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily except Mon, 10am-6pm & 5pm-8pm.

A permanent display of paintings and sculpture showing the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Naghi Museum
Chateau Pyramides, 9 Mohamed Al-Ghazali St., Giza. A museum devoted to the paintings of

Mohamed Naghi (1888-1956), the Alexandrian artist who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Makhar Museum
Tahrir St., Giza. Daily except Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.

A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Makhar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Sed Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egyptian Awakening became, somewhat ironically, an icon of post-revolutionary Egypt.

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French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis area, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St., Imbabia St., Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. Until 11 Nov.

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Tel 575 5333. Daily 10am-6pm, 3pm-6pm, 9pm & midnight. Normal, 11.30am-1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm; Thur & Sat midnight show. MGM, Main Grand Mall, Kollat El-Nar St., Maadi. Tel 333 0066. Daily 10am-9pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The planet is under threat of contamination by aliens. The American president (it's an American film, remember?) calling on the world to unite, saves the Earth from destruction on the fourth day of the invasion.

Legends of The Fall
El-Hanager, 1, El-Hanager Mall, Romy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm; Thur-Sat midnight show. Ramada Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm & midnight.

Starring Brad Pitt, Anthony Hopkins and Julia Ormond, entangled in a web of passion, principles and eternal considerations.

Disobedience
Cairo Sheria, El-Ghazali St., Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Salam, 33 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St., Heliopolis. Tel 291 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Isabelle Adjani and Sharon Stone team in anti-male devilish schemes.

Runaway in The Bronx
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St., Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Jackie Chan's latest.

DANCE
National Folkloric Ballet of Mexico
Main Hall, Opera House, Giza. Tel 341 2926. 12-13 Nov, 9pm.

MUSIC
The Arabic Music Festival will continue until 10 Nov. For detailed programme, see Listings in the previous issue of *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Les Mariages de M. de Sade
Gomhary Theatre, Gomhary St., Tel 341 2926. 11-13 Nov, 11pm. French puppet show for the children.

Children's Concert
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. 11 Nov, 11pm. Performed by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra.

Jazz Concert
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. 11 Nov, 9pm. Yusef Khalil performs.

Music for Violin and Piano
Sour El-Makham, Main Campus, AUC, El-Dokki. Tel 337 5436. 13 Nov, 9pm. Featuring violinist Ayman El-Serisy performing works by Antonin Dvorak, AUC's resident composer, and others.

THEATRE
The Bacchae
Wallace Theatre, Grand Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Bisham St., Downtown. Tel 340 6861. 11 Nov, 9pm. Based on the play by Euripides, performed by AUC students and directed by Krista Scott.

El-Mahabbaya (The Buffoons)
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. 11 Nov, 9pm. Scripted by Mohamed El-Sagheer, adapted by Said El-Sagheer and directed by Hani Abdel-Mo'men.

El-Touf El-Sagheer (The Ring and The Bracelet)
El-Touf Theatre, Amha St., Tel 337 948. 11 Nov, 9pm. Adapted by El-Touf El-Sagheer's masterpiece adapted for the theatre.

Mahabbaya El-Ze'ab (The Mahabbaya of the Wolves)
Abdel-Rahim El-Ze'ab Hall, Eschikh Theatre, Tel 591 7783. Directed by Nabil Anis.

El-Ghazali (The Gypsy)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Nil. Tel 333 2454. Daily except Mon, 9pm. Directed by Sherif Abdel-Latif.

Belle (Enfance)
Medinet Nasr Theatre, Youssif Abbas St., Medinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Starring Salah El-Saidani, directed by Samir El-Arifi.

When two into three does go

When is a biennale not a biennale? When it doesn't happen, of course. Hala Halim explores the circumstances of Alexandria's very own now you see me, now you don't, artistic jamboree, and tracks down an elusive public collection of paintings

Not for the first time in its four-decade history the Alexandria Biennale for the Arts of the Mediterranean has reached an impasse. It appears, once again, to be facing the axe.

Held under the auspices of Alexandria Governorate, the biennale's chequered history during the past decade reads like an organiser's nightmare scenario come true. The previous — eleventh — biennale was postponed from 1993 to 1994. Likewise, the seventeenth biennale, held in 1991, was supposed originally to be held in 1989, while the sixteenth biennale was delayed to 1987.

As 1996 wore on, questions began to be raised about the possible cancellation of this year's event, fears that were allayed when on 29 March the daily *Al-Ahram* cited *Cleopatra* magazine, which quoted the governor of Alexandria, Counsellor Ismail El-Gawhathi, as saying that there was no basis to rumours that the biennale would not be going ahead. El-Gawhathi went on to say that preparations for the event were already well ahead and more countries would be participating in this year's event than had been expected. Yet as 1996 drew to a close, with no biennale in sight, the same old, hoary joke has resurfaced, and people are asking each other, once again, if it would not clarify matters to simply resume the event the triennale.

The Alexandria Biennale was launched in 1955 by Hussein Sobhi, the late patron of the arts and one-time head of the city's municipality. In a 1985 interview conducted by Alexandrian artist Esmat Dawestashi with Sobhi, the latter explained that the idea for a biennale for Mediterranean arts was in the air, with Spain and Italy as the prime contenders as hosts. But Sobhi hastened to place his bid for Alexandria with various consuls, and thus secured the event for the city. The venue of the biennale has always been the Museum of Fine Arts which Sobhi had founded the year before and which came to bear his name.

The biennale was conceived as a re-affirmation of the Mediterranean component of Alexandria's cultural identity. The first Alexandria Biennale was inaugurated by President Gamal Abdel-Nasser on 26 July, the anniversary of the revolution. The participation of Miro, and the inclusion of works by Utrillo, Vlaminck, Derain, Vuillard and Chagall, and in early biennales the participation of the most outstanding contemporary Egyptian artists, including Abdel-Hadi El-Gazzar, Seif Wanli, Marguerite Nakhlia and Abdel-Hadi El-Weshahi, meant that the event had an auspicious start.

Overseen by Hussein Sobhi for more than three decades, Alexandria's biennale built an enviable reputation as it became a fixture on the Mediterranean cultural map. The only occasion when the biennale was postponed during Sobhi's lifetime was in 1967, due to the war. But following his illness and death in 1987 a pattern of procrastination and apathy set in, and the event was repeatedly delayed. Eventually the Ministry of Culture intervened and, through the National Centre of Fine Arts, offered the Alexandria Governorate considerable financial assistance. Yet the continued lack of dedicated organisers in Alexandria fuelled growing concerns that the biennale would end up being cancelled altogether. Thus, when in 1993 the event did not take place, Dawestashi was delegated by the Ministry of Culture to head the Hussein Sobhi Museum of Fine Arts and to prepare for the eighteenth biennale.

Despite bureaucratic obstacles and a dearth of competent administrative staff, Dawestashi managed, in record time, to organise a biennale considered by many to be the best in over a decade. He ensured that the governorate came through with sums necessary to fund a much-needed paint job for the museum. Among other achievements of Dawestashi's tenure was the compilation of a study on the history of the international competition, *Biennale d'Alexandria (1955-1994): Etude historique*, published at his own expense. The meticulous, exhaustive documentation provided in the volume was no mean feat, considering, as Dawestashi explains in the preface, that hardly any material was available in the museum, and that tracking down information very often turned into something resembling a wild goose chase. Dawestashi resigned in 1995, however, placing the task of getting the next biennale together firmly back in the court of the governorate.

What explanations, then, would governor of Alexandria, Counsellor El-Gawhathi, have for the fact that the nineteenth biennale has not taken place in 1996 despite the statement he made in March? While the Alexandria Governorate was not available for comment, Major-General Hazem Abu Shleib, under-secretary for tourism and summer resorts who works at the Authority for Tourism Promoting, the council of which is chaired by the governor, was more forthcoming. "The biennale is held once every two years," Abu Shleib began confidently, "and the last event, in 1994, was postponed from 1993. Now, when we started looking into the biennale of 1996, we, well we found we couldn't hold it because it coincided with a triennale — I don't know of what exactly — held in Cairo."

Given that such coincidences are bound to occur, could it perhaps be that the Second Alexandria World Festival, held some six weeks ago, diverted the authorities' attention from the biennale? Abu Shleib, in his capacity as secretary of the higher committee of the Second Alexandria World Festival, would be in a position to answer that question. But he scoffs at the suggestion. He goes to great lengths to pin the blame of the festival, particularly of opera *Otello*, onto the producer and more specifically, on his misguided choice of a PR company which subsequently mishandled the sales. Abu Shleib



Three works from the permanent collection of the Hussein Sobhi Museum of Fine Arts. Clockwise from top left: A study attributed to Giambattista Tiepolo; a still life by Margot Veillon; a still life by Claude Severin

then leafs through a file of miscellaneous documents on the biennale. He passes at a fax dated 16 October addressed to the governor of Alexandria, sent by Ahmed Nawwar, head of the National Centre of Fine Arts.

In the fax Nawwar reiterates two requests already made to the governor of Alexandria in return for the centre's financial input to the biennale. The governor, the letter states, is to issue a decree to the effect that in future both the biennale and the Hussein Sobhi Museum of Fine Arts be supervised by the centre. "And who could relinquish the property of the government?" remarks Abu Shleib in tones of finality — overlooking the fact that Nawwar's request involves an administrative transfer of authority from one governmental institution to another.

Just how big, then, is the budget necessary for holding the biennale and would Alexandria Governorate be unable to foot the biennale bill single-handedly? Abu Shleib claims that for the eighteenth biennale Alexandria Governorate advanced LE100,000 for the renovation of the museum and that the Organisation for Promoting Tourism offered LE15,000. The Ministry of Culture and the National Centre of Fine Arts, according to Abu Shleib, and as later corroborated by Dawestashi and Nawwar, financed — as in previous years — the funds necessary for the awards, the travel and accommodation expenses of artists and jury as well as the printing of the catalogues. Abu Shleib concludes that the financial input of the National Centre of Fine Arts is indispensable for the biennale — hence, he implies, the current impasse.

Asked whether he thought Alexandria Governorate could sponsor the biennale alone, Dawestashi is vehemently affirmative. "The question is not whether Alexandria Governorate can afford to hold the biennale without external financial assistance — of course it can. In the past it always footed the bill," he points out, adding that in the course of preparations for the previous biennale he had formed an Association for the Friends of the Biennale, comprising prominent figures in the city who could potentially offer financial assistance as well as act as a fund raising network should the Ministry of Culture withhold support. He remarks, however, that the association has not been very active recently. Dawestashi also points out that there is no reason why donations could not be gathered from local businessmen in return for publicity.

To Dawestashi, as well as to other artists and administrators interviewed, the true reason for the impasse is the lack of any real interest in or commitment to the biennale on the part of Alexandria Governorate. Indeed, despite the increasing centralisation of all things in Cairo, the governorate seems to lack interest in any form of patronage of the arts beyond the in-

augural photo-opportunities.

"Cultural life in Alexandria is nil... It started waning in the late '70s... I have reached the stage where, had it not been for my love of Alexandria, I would have left," says Alexandrian artist Ali Ashour.

"There is no interest in the biennale or in art in the administration of the current governor of Alexandria," comments Alexandrian artist Tharwat El-Bahr, the new head of the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo who curated the Egyptian wing at the last biennale. "Nor should there be a budgetary problem within the governorate to prevent it from holding the event," he elaborates.

"Alexandria is a sad city, culturally eroded by the day," comments painter and illustrator Gamil Shafik, a prize winner at the last biennale. "It is a well-established practice that the governor or mayor of a city should play a role in promoting its artistic life," he adds, "but the governor of Alexandria potentially does not care for culture. And since the governor has not come through, and is not interested in continuing the biennale, the transfer of the biennale to any authority that might ensure the regularity and continuity of the event would be welcome." The National Centre of Fine Arts, he asserts, is perfectly qualified to handle the biennale.

What then of that other request put by the National Centre of Fine Arts — the transfer of the supervision of the Hussein Sobhi Museum of Fine Arts to the centre?

The two-storey building on Menasse Street, Mubarram Bey, was constructed in 1954 to house a collection of some 200 paintings of European art donated to the municipality, and to function as an exhibition and concert venue. The complex, the venue of the annual International Book Fair, is often frequented on account of the Municipal Library which was also relocated to an adjoining building.

While the fresh paint the museum received prior to the last biennale is not yet peeling, the revival the venue witnessed during Dawestashi's tenure seems to be already wearing off. "While he was head of the museum, Dawestashi filled the place with activities — exhibitions, concerts, theatre, film. All sorts of people benefited a great deal from these activities, and not just those who are interested in painting and fine arts," comments Ashour. "Unfortunately, since his resignation, the place has gone back to being a bureaucratic governmental institution. You go to see an exhibition in the evening and they tell you it's closed, come back in the morning. Anywhere else in the world, exhibitions are open in the evening when people can go and see them."

The fundamental requisites of any museum are, it would appear, still lacking, due to the governorate's un-

willingness to earmark a budget for the upgrading of the venue, explains Dawestashi. Despite his repeated requests, he says, the governorate did not supply such basic necessities as typewriters, a xeroxing machine, a projector for slides, or a vehicle capable of transporting paintings, nor did it advance funds necessary to repair the leaking roof. Another index of the general dilapidation of the museum caused by long neglect is its library of art books.

"The first time I saw the library was with [the late Alexandrian artist] Seif Wanli, who unlocked it for me. This was sometime in the '70s," explains Ashour. "The library was full of reference works on art but they were already quite moth eaten. I don't know where the library is now."

Dawestashi maintains that the library still exists but that a large number of the books are in very bad shape, having been left to mould away.

It is, however, the museum's permanent collection of paintings that is in direct need of the qualified attention it stands a chance of receiving should the venue be transferred to the supervision of the National Centre of Fine Arts. Rather than remain on display, the paintings have long since been deposited in a room in the museum.

Dawestashi says that during his tenure as head of the museum his repeated requests for proper restoration of the much damaged paintings — which include works by Italian and Dutch masters dating from the eighteenth century and earlier — went unheeded. Asked why the permanent collection is not exhibited — the purpose, after all, for which the museum was built — Abu Shleib has a ready answer. "To exhibit such rare paintings you would need light, and costly, security."

Perhaps then the last word on both the biennale and the museum should go to Ahmed Nawwar, head of the National Centre of Fine Arts.

"The centre requested the governor of Alexandria to issue a decision giving us full jurisdiction over the biennale in order that we might make the suitable preparations. But to this day the decision has not been issued by the governor."

"Time is running out," says Nawwar, "and the delay does no good for the biennale or for Egypt's reputation and credibility on the international cultural scene."

As to the centre's request regarding the museum, Nawwar explained: "The museum contains a collection of paintings by foreign artists, alongside Egyptian works. For a few years now the governor has not made the decision [to transfer the administration of the museum to the centre]. This exposes the permanent collection to damage, and also means that the museum is not properly exploited, either culturally or economically."

In addition to upgrading the museum and placing it under electronic surveillance, says Nawwar, the centre would ensure that the permanent collection receives expert restoration.

At the last biennale, from left: Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni, Head of the National Centre of Fine Arts Ahmed Nawwar, Major-General Hazem Abu Shleib, Governor of Alexandria Ismail El-Gawhathi and Alexandrian artist Esmat Dawestashi

collection, ex-head of the museum Dawestashi explains that he found the paintings lined against the walls in a room on the premises with no thought devoted to the

conditions of storage. "While some of the works," he says, "were in relatively good condition, others were in bad shape but salvageable and yet others were completely destroyed."

While Dawestashi was head of the museum, he adds, he "refused to come near the permanent collection, due to its poor condition... I wanted a specialised committee to be formed in document the works as they are then restore them."

But in the opinion of Major-General Hazem Abu Shleib, under whose authority the museum falls, storage conditions should not cause undue worry though many people would perhaps be less sanguine about the damp climate of the coastal city being perfect for the unmonitored storage of major works of art.

"It is as damp in my house and yours," offers Abu Shleib, "and besides, restoration is inexpensive: the works we showed during the Alexandria World Festival were restored before the exhibition. Their restoration cost only LE1,000."

Asked what was involved in the restoration of the works, Abu Shleib explained that it involved the repair of chipped frames and the cleaning of paintings.

Plain Talk

What constitutes an ideal book review, and what are the qualities that mark the ideal reviewer? Perhaps such questions are redundant since there are, potentially, as many answers as there are readers of books.

Should a book review simply describe the contents of a given volume in a manner that is as free of value judgments as possible? If books are news items, which appears increasingly to be the case, should they simply be reported? Certainly such a strategy plays safe, but is this what the readers expect?

There are those, of course, who want the reviewer to give his or her own judgment, to say whether the book is good or bad and, preferably, why. Reviewing should not be reduced to the status of completely objective reporting, if indeed there can ever be such a thing. But here, of course, other problems arise. Literary circles are generally close knit. Reviewers know writers, and all three are involved in an intense, symbiotic relationship. It is a closed world, and one in which favours are done, old scores settled, backs scratched.

In short, the tenor of reviews can all too easily be governed by social considerations. Book reviewing, of course, is an important part of the book trade in the West. The interest reviews can excite in any given title is considered of enormous importance by publishers. And indeed there are many journals published in the West devoted exclusively to book reviews.

The *London Review of Books* is one such title. It appears twice a month and has built up a stable of eminent reviewers, including Edward Said. Indeed, the current issue of the magazine contains a piece by Said, "Lost Between War and Peace" in which he describes his recent travels with his son in Palestine. This, of course, is not a review but, as the assistant editor Jeremy Harding told me, *The London Review of Books* is keen to give its contributors as much leeway as possible in writing on subjects in which they are interested.

Until very recently *The London Review of Books* was closely linked with another publication, the *New York Book Review*, which appears on the other side of the Atlantic.

To mark its centenary, the *New York Book Review* has published a special issue containing what it deems the most significant reviews to have appeared on its pages in over a century.

Reviews, dating back to 1896, include such titles as *The Bravest Man in the World* and *Sons and Lovers*. One of the most noticeable things about this publication is the evidence it furnishes of the publication's penchant for the amusing headline. A review of Margaret Mitchell's block buster *Gone with the Wind* carried the headline "A Study in Scarlet". Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was reviewed beneath the headline "Future Shock" while Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* carried the suitably Hemingwayesque legend "Worth Fighting For". Which brings me back to my initial question. What qualities mark the good reviewer?

Certainly there is a strong belief in reviewers restricting themselves to their own areas of expertise, which seems to tie in to a general trend towards ever increasing specialisation. Yet unfortunately specialists very often get too ensnared in their own craft, and a display of expertise, however exciting it might be for other experts, can often make dull reading for the general, non-specialist public.

Often, of course, the reviewer falls into that hold all class — the man, or woman, of letters. I well remember George Orwell's lament, published in a 1946 essay *Confessions of a Book Reviewer*, about the pitfalls of this portmanteau trade. He writes of one particularly daunting package arriving from his editor containing five books, including *A Short History of European Democracy*, *Tribal Customs in Portuguese East Africa* and *Scientific Dairy Farming*. The idea, suggested the editor, would go well together in a composite review.

Orwell describes the professional reviewer's lot as less than enviable. It is, he writes, "a grim way of life — inventing reactions to books about which he has no spontaneous feeling whatsoever." Reviewing books is undoubtedly a craft, a kind of journeyman activity. But it can also be an art, as reviewers from Hazlitt to Edmund Wilson have consistently shown. Perhaps I should return the assistant editor of *The London Review of Books*, who defines the task of the reviewer thus: "to stimulate, to argue, in celebration, in praise (occasionally), to explain, to amuse, to popularise new ideas, in keep the conversation going."

Mursi Saad El-Din

Art for the people

During the Second Alexandria World Festival last September the Hussein Sobhi Museum of Fine Arts held an exhibition of a selection of paintings from its permanent collection, in addition to works by contemporary Alexandrian artists. It had been some time since the public had seen any of the paintings from this permanent collection. Among the paintings that emerged from storage were works attributed to Salvador Rosa (1615-1673) and to Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770).

The core collection of the museum, comprising some 200 paintings, was, according to a pamphlet by Esmat Dawestashi, donated to the Municipality of Alexandria earlier this century by a German collector, Edward Friedheim. In an interview with Dawestashi, Hussein Sobhi, once the head of the municipality, recounts the following anecdote: "When I moved to Alexandria and was appointed director of the municipality, I found some beautiful pictures thrown in the basement... So I immediately thought of having a museum built [for them], and to add to them some more. And I did have the Museum of Fine Arts built in 1954. It was inaugurated by the revolutionary leadership, headed by Gamal Abdel-Nasser, on 26 July 1954."

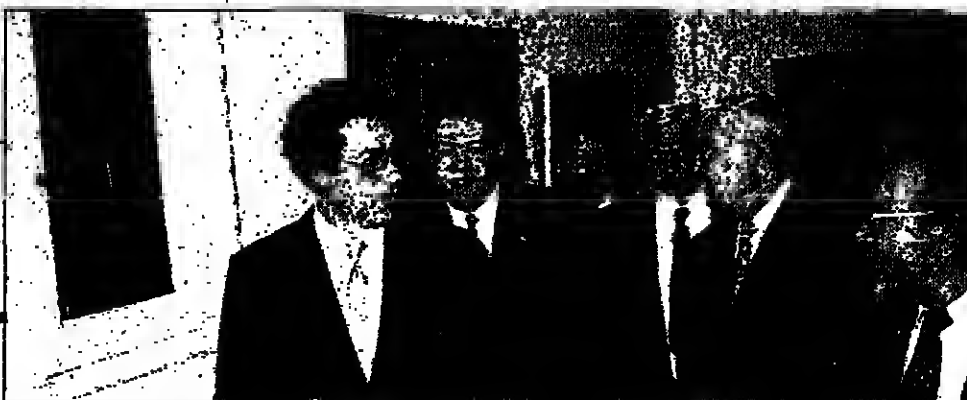
Yet, prior to being relegated to the basement of the municipality, the collection, it would appear, had been exhibited. In the 10th (1938) edition of *Alexandria: How to*

See it, by Alexander R. Cury, we find the following entry:

"The Picture Gallery is situated in Rue Abou-Dardas [sic] near the Library. It contains more than 200 pictures and reproductions of masterpieces. Admission price is one Piastre and it is open 9-12.30am and 4-6.30pm, from 1 June to 30 Sept. and 9-12.30am and 3-5.30pm, from 1 October to May 31."

Route: Tram marked white star or green petal. Tram fare: 1st class: 1 Piastre; 2nd class: 1/2 Piastre. The Picture Gallery may well be the Friedheim collection, given that the number of paintings is the same. In any event, the new museum was erected on a piece of land donated by the Baron de Menasse.

Around this core collection other collections accumulated. In the pamphlet on the museum, for example, Dawestashi states that a number of Orientalist paintings were donated by Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil. A francophile collector, Mahmoud Khalil's villa in Giza has recently been opened as a museum housing his main collection of European art. The Hussein Sobhi Museum of Fine Arts, furthermore, acquired a number of works from contemporary Egyptian artists, including oil paintings, watercolours, lithographs and sculptures. It is in this last category, one assumes, that some of the works exhibited



during the Alexandria World Festival, like those of Seif Wanli, Abdel-Hadi El-Gazzar, Mohamed and Effat Nagui and Margot Veillon, belong.

The exact number of works that form the permanent collection and the provenance of each remains unclear. In the brochure accompanying the exhibition, for example, the work by Tiepolo is described as "Series of Studies for Composition" which leaves the viewer in the dark as to how many more studies there are and whether they are part of the collection. Likewise, neither the dimensions of the work nor its provenance are provided.

On my visit last week to the Hussein Sobhi Museum of Fine Arts, my request to see the collection was refused. Could one look at the archives, perhaps? It was out of the question, answered the custodian of paintings from the permanent collection, Mrs Khaleida Ahmed. Are all the works in the collection registered in the archives? Mrs Ahmed maintains that they are, though she admits that there are no photographs of the works as yet. Two professors from the Faculty of Fine Arts, she claims, are currently at work taking stock of the permanent collection.

Asked about the storage conditions of the permanent

Amidst rumours of scandals and financial mismanagement, in an unprecedented move, the Gezira Sporting Club has been placed under the administration of an extraordinary interim board, nominated on 18 October by order of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, headed by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ghazouli.

The move was prompted by the fact that the Annual General Assembly, due to convene on 16 October, had failed to take place. Under the presidency of former prime minister Aziz Sedki, the interim board includes a list of names which reads like the who's who of Cairene business and government: Hazem Hassan as treasurer, Ali Wali, Samir Anwar, Mohamed Baligh, Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, Ismail El-Shafie, Ragaa Attia and Mohamed Sheta. Abdel-Aziz El-Shafie, the club manager, was recalled to his post, where he will remain until the investigation currently in progress is completed and new elections are called in October 1997 at the latest.

The Gezira club, this bastion of propriety, whose distinguished members include the pro- and post-revolution *crème de la crème*, has had no qualms about publicly airing the open rift between the members of the former board and its president, Dr Hashem Fouad. Accusations are flying and fingers are pointed in all directions. As president of the board, Dr Hashem Fouad is held responsible for this unusual state of affairs, but while members of the defunct board are not forthcoming with explanations, Fouad welcomes questions.

Fouad is no stranger to controversy touching on his style of management and the use of the powers vested in him. As dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Qasr El-Aini, he has had his detractors and his admirers and has taken both his stride, changing off criticism with majesty and accepting accolades with panache, but, as former Gezira board member representing the club's young generation, Heba El-Sheikh remarks: "Dr Hashem Fouad always inspires strong feelings. He is adored by his followers and actively hated by his opponents."

The controversy enveloping Fouad's dictatorial ways is therefore not new. In February 1992, Sayed Marei, the late speaker of parliament, speaking to the sports reporter of *Al-Gomhouriya* newspaper, commented: "That the honourable Dr Hashem Fouad, president of the board of the Gezira (Sporting) Club is a dictator, is indisputable. I would not be surprised that he conceals himself with this opinion and is not bothered by it in the least. He was a regular dictator at the Faculty of Medicine of Qasr El-Aini, but it was under his iron rule that the hospital was completely upgraded. There are certain situations where nothing short of dictatorship can save the day."

Not surprisingly one is tempted to draw parallels between Fouad's challenging attitudes as dean of the Faculty of Medicine and as president of the Gezira club. In both cases he was forced to account for his very personalised management techniques. He has no problem admitting that he considered himself the highest authority in both cases, and he has always acted in consequence. He does not need a board, he says, to make decisions, in the best of cases, the board will only slow down the implementation of necessary measures. If something has to be done, he just does it.

"He is not interested in the outcome of such decisions," fumes Ramzi Rushdi, a club member who has run against Fouad twice already in the club elections and lost. "He seems to ignore the fact that there is a democratic process that should be allowed to take place," echoes Mahmoud Makhoul, a club member.

Safra Dayma

Lebanese "Ablama" chicken

Ingredients:
One chicken (cut in 8 parts)
400 gms. baby onions
3 tsp. white flour
1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
1 bunch parsley leaves (finely chopped)
70 gms. pine nuts
One bouillon cube
Corn oil
Salt + pepper + allspice + 3 cardamom seeds

Method:
Peel the outer crust of the onions and only one layer without removing the tips or the ends, keeping them whole and intact. Wash the chicken parts and season them with salt and pepper, then sprinkle one tablespoonful of flour over them, coating the parts. In a frying pan, heat some oil and fry them golden on both sides and remove on kitchen blotting paper. In a cooking pan, heat some more oil and fry the onions until golden in colour. Add the remaining flour, stirring it within the onions until it slightly colours, then add the fried chicken parts plus one cup of water and the cube. Bring to boil, stirring in the cube until it melts, then add the pepper, allspice and the cardamom. Cover and simmer over low heat and leave to cook. Fry the pine nuts in oil until golden, strain them from the oil and add them to the chicken, a quarter of an hour before removing from heat, and also add the lemon juice. When the chicken parts are cooked, remove the cardamom, sprinkle the parsley and serve hot with rice and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Mutiny at the Lido

Order words about the club's new management, exclusive by Fayza Hassan



Even more serious is the fact that Fouad's alleged "egotism and megalomania" have exacerbated the generation gap. The young are often shocked by his ignorance of and indifference to what is considered politically correct. "He orders the club's employees around as if they were working for him," says Heba El-Sheikh. "His style of managing the club is personal, totally unprofessional. It could have worked in the old days, when the club comprised a couple of thousand members of the elite. Now we have thirty thousand families: 120,000 members and this place has to be run professionally," adds Rushdi, who is in favour of a professional managerial team, as opposed to club members who volunteer to serve on the board.

Like many members of the older generation, Fouad believes in a strong hand to guide the young. He wants no nonsense in "his" club. He has taken it upon himself to illuminate a *giorno* the remotest parts of the grounds until late at night and hired guards who tour the whole area constantly with their police dogs. "Every nook and cranny" is checked several times a night, he says proudly, and teenagers doing what teenagers do are mercilessly limited down. "There were brought into the club before my time, and drugs," he says. "Couple used to neck in parked cars. Now the surveillance is so strict that we have not had an incident in years."

Many parents approve these methods wholeheartedly. They are happy to know that their children can be left in safety at the club until late at night. But El-Sheikh disagrees: "Youngsters avoid the club, that is all," she says. "They do what they want to do elsewhere. What he does is old fashioned. We know now that the only way to keep teenagers out of mischief is by creating a wide range of activities which will be attractive enough to draw them to the club and keep them occupied." Fouad protests that he has done that as well, that he has hired foreign coaches, "the best in the world," to promote sports at the club. He cites his renovation of the central tennis courts, the new squash courts, extra swimming pools, club houses and rest areas as indication enough of his concern for the club's youngsters.

Rushdi and El-Sheikh both claim that these were unwelcome initiatives. "Foreign coaches are unpopular and the youngsters relate much better to their Egyptian trainers. They speak the same language," explains Rushdi. "The coach he is referring to was a disaster, and he cost the club \$5,000 a month," says El-Sheikh. "We had to stop the international tennis matches when he covered

the courts with tartan, a material which does not comply with international standards. It took us five years to return the courts to their regulation hard clay covering. The new swimming pools have developed leaks a year after completion and the squash courts are sub-standard," she complains.

A member of the former board who resigned last year, shortly before the latest events, "for health reasons" and prefers to remain anonymous, recounts the upgrading of the kitchen. "When natural gas was introduced to the club's kitchen, Dr Fouad asked the gas people to provide him with modern equipment. They sent him a contractor who sold him various useless pieces. The club is now stuck with LE170,000 worth of useless equipment."

The problem, they all agree, stems from the fact that Fouad neither consults the members of the board, nor wants to listen to them. He, on the other hand, finds them an impediment to his over-flowing energy. This off-hand attitude has offended practically every one of his collaborators, who are generally intent on following a more democratic path and worry about what Fouad considers useless detail, namely the budget and contravention to the club's statutes.

In particular, the club manager, in whom are vested the executive powers of the board, regularly finds himself at loggerheads with the club's doctor whose personal ambition is to leave his mark on the club in the form of buildings and innovations by which he will be remembered. Since 1989, the beginning of the Hashem Fouad era, the club managers have been known to resign, be replaced, fired then hired once more, a clear indication of the tug-of-war taking place within the club's administration.

Taking advantage of Fouad's departure to the US for medical treatment, the board changed the club's manager. The move infuriated Fouad, who fired the "new" manager (not a newcomer to such sea-sawing) on the spot when he returned. A row ensued, seemingly won by the board, who advised the doctor to stay in his office and leave the direction of the club's affairs to those in charge. "They wanted me to be a figurehead," he complains indignantly. "Never! I will never accept to sit in my office and do nothing. I shall serve to the last day in my life the people who have put their trust in me."

Echoes of his comments to an *Al-Ahram* reporter when he had to retire from the Faculty of Medicine still ring in many ears: "I shall not indicate the fix for the age of retirement at sixty, nor discuss its positive and negative implications in this context. Suffice to say that

we, the elders, view retirement from our own angle, different from that of the young who say [that] it is the duty of old people to step down and make room for the young generations. They have had their fair share. It is our turn."

Having resigned his functions as president of the Gezira board on 16 October 1996, Fouad fully intends to run again, "to answer the call of those who need him," says Ashraf Farg, a club member who gives Fouad an enthusiastic vote of confidence. "In just a few short years," he says, "he has pulled the club out of a pit."

Fouad does not deny the charges levelled against him. He did spend the reserve the club had in the bank when he took over, "but a club is not a profitable enterprise. It is not supposed to have reserves. These have to be used for improvements and the well-being of members."

One bone of contention between him and the board was their wish to create a new branch of the club in Nasr City to relieve the pressure on the infrastructure of the Gezira. Unable to delegate, Fouad was not about to decentralise. "I toured the grounds and within hours had found many areas that were practically abandoned. I hastened to put them to good use and thus increased the accommodation capacity of the club," he says. "Yet they have constantly chosen to belittle my achievements and only concentrate on what they claim are shortcomings. I have been locked in my office for several months now, let them show me what they have accomplished during that time!"

He is smarting from the attitude of the board which last January forced him to abandon his active role and called in a new executive director. But during the few months preceding the fated 16 October, the balance had begun to tip decidedly. "He had to be stopped," says El-Sheikh, who was instrumental in compiling the list of contraventions and complaints presented to the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

To understand how all this came to pass one should go back to 1991, two years after the popular Dr Hashem Fouad was elected president of the board by a sweeping majority. As reported by *Al-Ahram* on 18 June 1991, the board at the time found itself in disagreement with the performance of the club director. During a board meeting it was decided to resolve the question by secret ballot. Those against keeping him won by one vote, whereupon, in an act of solidarity, Fouad resigned his functions as president. An extraordinary general assembly was called and returned a vote of no confidence in the

board and its president.

But, Ismail El-Bagri wrote at the time in *Al-Ahram*, "while it was expected that at this point the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports would have to step in and appoint an interim board until regular elections could take place, nothing of the sort happened." Instead, the general assembly proceeded with the elections and Hashem Fouad was returned to the presidency of the board with 1698 votes over his opponent Ramzi Rushdi, who trailed behind with 444 votes. This indicated that the members of the assembly trusted the board president, but not the other members of the board, of whom only three returned to complete Fouad's list.

"Why would an assembly which had just cast a vote of no confidence in the president of the board promptly reelect him," wondered El-Bagri.

Rushdi, defeated at the time, thinks he has the answer: "It was all fixed, including his false resignation. It allowed him to have the board of his liking and tighten his grip on the club." Fouad won again in the 1993 elections.

From then on, however, attempting to curb Fouad's authority, through resignations, rows and repeated complaints to the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports. The list of complaints is 300 pages long. It met with no reply and seemed to have been put aside. "Although many of the resignations presented to the Council detailed their causes, usually pointing to contravention of the club statutes incurred by the president of the board, there were no investigations into the matter," says El-Sheikh.

In an open letter published by *Al-Ahram* on 28 May 1994, board member Amr Gazarani hinted at cracks within the power structure of the board, exacerbated by a growing antagonism between the president and the treasurer, while "ill-planned projects" initiated by the president without the board's consent had made a serious dent in the club's nest egg, rumoured to exceed LE10 million.

In November 1995, *Al-Ahram* announced the resignation of the treasurer of the board of the Gezira Sporting Club. Fouad's response was swift. Through the media, he accused the treasurer of lacking vision. Promoting sports was the primary objective of a sporting club, he said. International-calibre teams gave the club its reputation, he added — not the "excellence of the escalope" restaurant provided. This issue exchange stemmed from the refusal of the board to condone the hiring of a Yugoslav basketball coach "of world renown", who was costing the club \$5,000 a month — a pittance, according to Fouad, since he was to upgrade the basketball team to international standards. They could save on the kitchen's expenses, which reached LE6,000,000 a year, Fouad said.

"Basketball is to the Gezira what soccer is to the Ahi," he told an unconvinced board. His own game was over, however. In a repeat performance of the events that had favoured him in 1991, he attempted to appeal to the general assembly and refused to sign the annual budget, but, fearing that a general assembly would return him once more, the members of the board followed his resignation by their own walkout en masse. In consequence the annual general assembly could not be convened.

On 18 October, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ghazouli, in his capacity as head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, appointed a board of directors headed by former prime minister Aziz Sedki to manage the Gezira Sporting Club until the next elections, which will take place in October 1997 at the latest.

Hashem Fouad has vowed to return, triumphantly. The members of the interim board have no comments.



Paint them green and blue

There is a type of mothers who like nothing better than to see their daughters rise and shine. Literally. Unless the daughters drip with sequins, gold and diamonds, unless they are coiffed, manicured and made up to kill every time they step out of the house, even on their way to the supermarket, these mothers are not happy. Nothing is ever enough; they stop believing in understated elegance the moment it is applied to their daughters, even though they may be practicing it themselves. Young women should be striking, they should turn heads and force attention, they insist. "When I was your age..."

As expected, the daughters invariably develop the timid nature of the violet, shunning the slightest touch of bluish on their cheeks, let alone shining ornaments. Good jeans and oversized shirts appeal much more to their taste, their way of resisting the formidable parental pressure.

Mireille is such a daughter, with a mother whose aspirations clearly leaned in the direction of flamboyance, at least where Mireille's attire was concerned. Very early on, she plagued her with criticism and advice single-mindedly directed towards upgrading a determinedly conservative appearance which she saw as lacking panache. Mireille resisted quietly and with a great deal of humour: she did not want to look, on the outside, different from what she felt on the inside, she firmly told her mother. The war went on, throughout Mireille's adolescence and far beyond.

A few years ago, Mireille received a phone call from her father, living in Lebanon at the time. Odette, her mother, was in hospital, about to have an operation. Mireille left in a hurry to be with her. The night before the operation she sat at her mother's bedside. She was worried: Odette, as she had called her mother all her life, was not her usual self. She has not commented on her daughter's "drib" appearance although Mireille, with more important things to worry about, had really made no effort in the elegance department.

"Mireille," said Odette suddenly, "I know I shall not wake up from the operation tomorrow." Mireille was alarmed. The operation was serious, undoubtedly, but in no way life-threatening. Did her mother have a premonition? "Of course you will," she told her mother, expressing more confidence than she felt. "You are going to be just fine." She was hoping that she had sounded appropriately cheerful. Was her mother hiding something? "I know that I am not going to wake up," Odette repeated, "... but if, by a stroke of luck, I do..." Her voice trailed off suddenly. "Yes," said Mireille, hesitating. The mother closed her eyes, as if overwhelmed by the ordeal ahead. "Yes, what if you wake up?" asked the daughter almost impatiently. She was pecking, but trying to cover up her anxiety by reverting to her usual, slightly abrupt ways with her mother. Odette's voice was now no more than a whisper. "If I wake up, I want to see your eyes really close to mine. I want to see your eyes... I want this to be the very first thing I see... if I wake up," Mireille fought the tears back.

This was so unlike Odette. Strong and over critical of her daughter, she had never been prone to tearful sentimentality. As a matter of fact, she had always exhibited a healthy distaste for human weakness. Had her mother been given a sedative which was affecting her, she wondered. Should she call a nurse? Should the doctor be told that her mother was unwell? She hesitated and was about to go far help when her mother opened her eyes. "Mireille, promise me that the first thing I will see, if I wake up from the operation, will be your face, really close to mine," she was repeating. "And, when I look at your beautiful face, I will see your eyes, your lovely brown eyes... made up, with a lot of green and blue eyeshadow. And a lot of mascara. Don't forget the mascara."

Mireille who had leaned over her mother to hear her whisper, jerked back, furious, a cutting comment on the tip of her tongue, but Odette had closed her eyes and did not utter another word.

The next day, during the operation, Mireille dashed to her parents' apartment and frantically searched her mother's makeup case. Until this minute she had had no intention of acquiescing to what she considered a ridiculous request, but now she wanted to ward off bad luck. She smeared some of her mother's eyeshadow on her lids and raced back to the hospital. Odette, out of the recovery room, was a long time coming to. At least it seemed so to Mireille.

She tried to wake her mother up: "Odette, wake up, it is me, Mireille. Look at me," Odette would not wake up. "Please wake up, look at me, look at my face, look at my eyes," she urged, placing her face right in her mother's field of vision. Odette stirred slightly. Mireille's face was now less than an inch away from her mother's. "Come on," she pleaded. "Look at me, mom!" My eyes the way you always wanted them? "No," yelled the mother, shutting her eyes tightly. Mireille was terrified: was her mother in pain? Was she having a vision? "No," Odette moaned, "that is not nearly enough, Mireille... Where is the green and the blue? And Mireille, you forgot the mascara."

Fayza Hassan

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

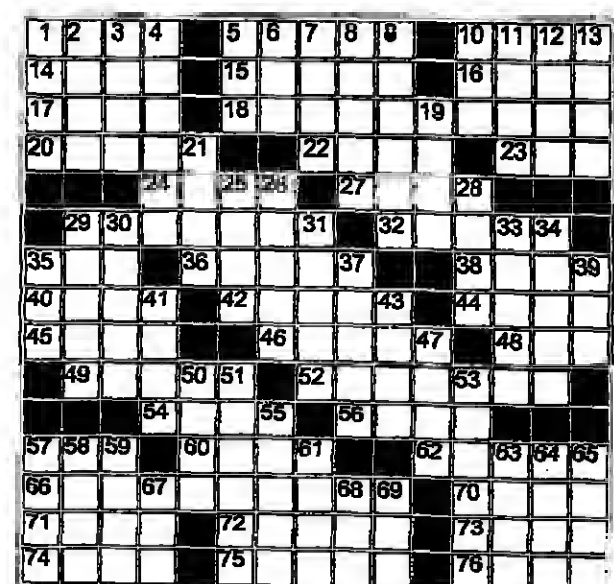
ACROSS

- Throng (4)
- Swollen state of tissue (5)
- Footless (4)
- Retain, lease (4)
- Lozenge (5)
- French composer (4)
- Conception (4)
- Describing a popular book (10)
- Irritable (5)
- British public school (4)
- Sixth sense (3)
- Usages (4)
- Supreme Hindu god (4)
- Love (5)
- Lastadical (4)
- Capable (4)
- Determined by the sun (5)

ACROSS
1. Throng (4)
2. Swollen state of tissue (5)
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9. Irritable (5)
10. British public school (4)
11. Sixth sense (3)
12. Usages (4)
13. Supreme Hindu god (4)
14. Love (5)
15. Lastadical (4)
16. Capable (4)
17. Determined by the sun (5)
18. An age of the universe (10)
19. A group of plants formed usually from a single ancestor (5)
20. Thwarted (3)
21. Wren (4)
22. Spanish cheers (4)
23. South African village (4)
24. Eye greedily (4)

- Defense; appeal (4)
- Domed-roof at end of church, pl. (5)
- Pismire (3)
- Fallacy (5)
- Maroon; segregate (7)
- Pin (4)
- Peel, hide (4)
- Chore (5)
- Dexter hand (4)
- Piebald horse (5)
- When all is said and done (10)
- Shredded (4)
- Mr. Coty (4)
- Enliven (5)
- Dueling sword (4)
- Was familiar with (4)
- Disintegration of cells, pl. (5)
- North African title, pl. (4)

DOWN
1. Young child (4)
2. Be borne along by (4)
3. God of war (4)
4. Channel in the body (6)
5. Receding (3)
6. Deer (3)
7. Otherwise (4)
8. Ignorant persons, pl. (5)
9. Absolve from sin (6)
10. Everybody (3)
11. Wren (4)
12. Spanish cheers (4)
13. South African village (4)
14. Eye greedily (4)



- European river (4)
- Id (4)
- Formerly known as the Navigators' Islands (5)
- Operatic solo (4)
- Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth (5)
- Tanker (5)
- Shrill cries of pain (5)
- Thought (5)
- Group of plants formed usually from a single ancestor (5)
- Thwack (3)
- Desert havens (5)
- Initials of one medical specialist (3)
- Merrit (4)
- Concern oneself with (4)
- Accidental misconduct (4)
- Cerebral (6)
- Joined (6)
- Describing fertile earth (5)
- Thrust; jostle (4)
- Baking chamber (4)
- Part of N.B. (4)
- More (4)
- Negative (4)
- Three in cards (4)
- Some bulls (4)
- Modern (3)
- London School of Economics, abb. (3)
- Alternative (3)

مكتبة من الأصل

Heliopolis Olympics

Heliopolis Club's 5th International Squash Open had reverberations enough to be felt well beyond the borders of the club, the neighbourhood and the country, reports **Eman Abdel-Moeti**

The 5th Heliopolis International Squash Open, which concluded earlier in the week, yielded a number of surprises, not least of which was the welcome news that Egypt will play host to the first official Squash Olympics. The announcement was made following the final match last Sunday, from which Pakistani world champion Jansher Khan emerged victorious after besting Englishman Del Harris 3-0 to collect the \$7,000 prize.

The official presenter of the Professional Squash Association (PSA), Robert Edward, in tandem with Mohamed El-Menshawi, president of the Heliopolis Squash Open organising committee, revealed that Egypt will sponsor the first PSA recognised Squash Olympics in August 1997.

"El-Menshawi and I have formed a squash partnership... The Squash Olympics is our first project," Edward said. The idea of holding a Squash Olympics is a preliminary stage to incorporating squash in the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000. "Having squash in the Olympic Games is an old dream of all squash stars around the world," added Edward. Egypt's selection was endorsed by the World Squash Federation, the PSA, the African Squash Federation, and the Egyptian Supreme Council for Youth and Sports for its proven experience organising major squash tournaments and for the enthusiasm for the game displayed by Egyptian fans. Egypt, with its recently acquired portable glass-court, also has the capacity to draw the largest number of spectators — up to 5,000 — in the world of squash.

Comparing squash, a strenuous game where the athletes play for up to an hour, to tennis, which is an Olympic game, Edward wondered what was needed to demonstrate that squash fulfils all the characteristics of an Olympic game.

Egypt's favourite son and top-ranked Ahmed Barada's sudden withdrawal — citing severe fatigue following the New York Open — caused consternation among fans who expected no home-grown player to make it to the semi-finals in his absence.

But Amir Wagih, monitored the "Egyptian King" in the competition,

pulled out another surprise, beating Pakistani's Zubair Khan, 3-1 in the quarter-final. Wagih, giving no quarter to his opponent, spotted hopes he would do the impossible and defeat Del Harris, who was scheduled to meet Barada in the first round, managed a respectable third place. World Juniors' Championship runner up Karim El-Mistikawi, 18, astounded spectators as he bested Danny Meddings of England 3-2 in the first round before losing to Anthony Hill in the quarter-final 3-1.

Seven time world title-holder and newly-crowned Heliopolis champion Jansher Khan expressed his satisfaction with his achievement but said his greatest desire is to become the first squash player to win an Olympic medal. "Holding on to the world title for seven consecutive years means a lot to me. But having an Olympic medal would mean the whole world," said Khan.

The Edward and El-Menshawi partnership will also bear fruit in the completion of a long time ambition of Edward to produce a television documentary film on Egypt and Pakistan.

While the film will feature Egypt's squash history with such renowned players as Abdel-Fattah Amr, Ahmed Barada and Amir Wagih, it will also explore Egypt's modern culture. The segment on Pakistan will chronicle what Edward calls the "Khans dynasty" from Hashim, Jansher, through to Jansher Khan, each the dominant player of their time.

The documentary hopes to mine for answers to the question of why such talented players come from the city of Fushaw. The film will also sketch the history of squash from its introduction to the British forces through to today. Squash champs Jonah Berrington and Geoff Hunt of England, will be interviewed while walking with Edward along the Nile.

"If all goes well with the Squash Olympics and the documentary film, we will make Egypt the most important squash nation in the world and it will be my personal pleasure to see that happen," said Edward.



Jansher Khan, world no. 1 tricking a number of balls to beat Del Harris, his British contender



Abon Zeid scoring Ahli's goal to draw with Ahli of Jeddah

Farewell to football star

ON SUNDAY, football fans hid a bittersweet farewell to one of Egypt's and Africa's greatest football stars. Former national squad and Ahli Club team captain Taher Abu Zeid's retirement match turned into a sporting festival as fans marked the end of an era.

Spectators turned out in high numbers at the Cairo Stadium to witness the official retirement match of football great Abu Zeid in a showdown between Ahli of Egypt vs Ahli of Jeddah. The 34-year-old said his goodbye with a well-played goal to conclude the match with an 1-1 draw. Unlike other retirement matches, Abu Zeid, who hasn't played in four years, remained on the field the entire 90 minutes. The football giant entertained the audience with his talent as he displayed the skills and to remind fans of the old days.

The Ahli-Ahli match, was preceded by an exhibition game featuring veterans from different Egyptian clubs playing against a group of artists, actors, singers and friends of Abu Zeid. Though officially retired, Zeid will continue his career captaining Egypt's five-a-side team as they represent the African continent in the upcoming Five-a-side World Futsal Indoor Cup. The championship will be hosted by Spain from 24 November to 8 December. Abu Zeid will achieve the distinction of being the first Egyptian footballer to compete in three different world cups. The three-time captain won the Silver Shoe as the second top scorer at the 1981 World Juniors Cup in Australia and was a member of the Egyptian team at the 1990 Men's World Cup in Italy.

That judo that you do...

Egypt's judo champs returned home with good results after competing in the recent 5th Judo World Championship and the Rhodes International Judo Championship. **Abeer Anwar** reports

The Egyptian under-21 national judo squad returned to Cairo last week from participation in the 5th Judo World Championship held in Portugal. The team travelled to the Iberian Peninsula, fresh from a long training spell at the Olympic Centre in Madrid, for a two-week training camp in Spain prior to the championship.

Three athletes out of the five-member delegation distinguished themselves by realising top ten placings at the competition.

Sayed Abu Midan, winning five of his six matches, captured the bronze medal in the under-78kg category, yet was disappointed in coming so close but getting no cigar. "I was so near to the gold medal, which I've yearned for, but I lost to the French world champion in the under-78kg in the semi-finals," he said.

Compatriot Bassel El-Gharabawi, coming in seventh in the over-95kg, was likewise unenthusiastic with his outcome. "The draw matched me against a world champion in the pre-

liminaries," lamented the former bronze medalist in the previous world championship.

Heavyweight contender Ahmed Bali was the third Egyptian athlete to place in the top ten as he powered his way into the ninth place berth.

Major Sayed Sobah, president of the Egyptian Judo Federation (EJF) was, however, pleased with the results. "I am very satisfied with what the players have achieved especially since their preparation programme was tight due to lack of money," he said.

In a coinciding competition Egypt collected five gold medals, two silver and two bronze in the Rhodes International Judo Championship which took place from 21-30 October. To alleviate the temporary financial constraints upon the federation, Heliolido and El-Shams clubs covered the expenses for their athletes in the tournament which included competitors from Cyprus, Bulgaria, Portugal, Yugoslavia and Rhodes.

The women's competition was played in the form of a round-robin league where Heba Rashid won the gold in the heavyweight category, while Eman El-Bana mirrored her achievement in the under-56kg. Rasha Magdi and Sherin Hafez pinned down the silver in the under-48 and under-72kg categories and Ayt El-Bana and Ghada Sadek won bronzes in the under-61.5 and 52kg.

In the men's juniors' event three of Egypt's rising sons captured gold medals. Mustafa Abdel-Quader bested his opponent in the under-55, while Mohamed Hazem and Sherif Negr took the top spots in the under-46 and 65kg categories. Up and coming Tanim Hafez grabbed the silver in the under-46kg, Ahmed Hassem a bronze in the under-55kg and in the women's junior event, Sara Abdel Hamid won a silver in the under-44kg and Sara Magdi a bronze in the under-52kg.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

Students and scholars of the history of irrigation in Egypt know that the first major construction of a barrier across the Nile, after the barages, was the Aswan Dam, inaugurated jointly by the khedive and the brother of the king of England in December 1902. They also know the essential statistics about this project: "The dam is a

mile and a quarter long. Its average height is 66 feet. The dam contains 180 sluice gates of varying heights and widths of which 30 can be turned on and off. The water in the reservoir is 46 feet deep and the amount stored is 1,140 million tons or 1,500 million cubic yards.

Another fact familiar to those students and scholars is that the cornerstone for this project was laid by the Duke of Connaught, the brother of the king of England, on 12 April 1898 and the final stone was placed by the Duchess of Connaught on 10 December 1902. In other words, construction of the project took four and a half years, as is inscribed on the dam.

Apart from these facts and figures, there remains much information that probably is not known.

The low flooding levels, or "the paucity of the Nile," as *Al-Ahram* described it, provided the impetus behind the conception of the project. In its 18 January 1894 edition, *Al-Ahram* wrote that in the season of the lowest level of the Nile in 1892 the river provided only 17 million cubic metres, while the summer crops required 30 million cubic metres.

"For fear that this paucity might repeat itself over several seasons, it was imperative to conceive of a project that would create a reservoir so as to avert successive low floods," the paper said.

What is little known, however, is that the Aswan Dam was originally a French idea. *Al-Ahram* relates, "A French company called Etude du Nil, formed by Monsieur Desautel, applied to the government of Egypt in 1870 to study the course of the Nile. It was his conviction that fil-

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Egypt was spared the disastrous consequences of an unusually high Nile flood this year thanks to the Aswan High Dam, completed in 1970. The dam was the second reservoir Egypt built to harness flood waters. The first was constructed at Aswan over nearly five years and was inaugurated by Khedive Abbas II in December 1902. *Al-Ahram* then called it "a wondrous marvel" and "a monument to science, wisdom, technical prowess and expertise" — not knowing that a much greater marvel would rise some 60 years later just south of the first dam. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizq** tells the story of that first dam as reported then by *Al-Ahram*

low and uncultivated land could be cultivated and Egypt's wealth compounded if a dam could be built that would store the Nile waters that ordinarily flowed into the sea. He drew up plans and submitted them to the senior engineers in Egypt and Europe, all of whom confirmed that the project had potential. In 1876, Monsieur Desautel travelled to France and established a company with a base capital of 10,000 pounds. By 1882, this capital reached 80,000 pounds. The company was able to engage the services of Monsieur Jaquet, a prominent roads and bridges engineer in France, in order to study the project. When he arrived in Egypt, he travelled directly to Upper Egypt in a boat provided for his personal use by the Egyptian government. Accompanying him was a team of Egyptian engineers. On the conclusion of his studies, he drew up a lengthy report on the basis of which the company asked permission from the Egyptian government to construct a dam at its own risk.

However, as *Al-Ahram* notes, the disturbances to the south which were generated by the Mahdist revolution compelled the government to defer the project, although it promised the company that it would give it preferential treatment should it decide to go ahead with the project.

The debate was eventually joined by the *London Times*. Regarding the potential effect of the dam on Egyptian antiquities, it wrote, "We have learned that the site that has been selected for the dam is the most appropriate. The dam is an enterprise that holds great promise for the progress and prosperity of Egypt."

The French raised the spectre of earthquakes. Monsieur Bolet said, "An earthquake would rock the foundations of the dam and the pressure of the water behind it would cause it to collapse. The ensuing flood would immerse the entire country under water, drowning all its inhabitants and its bountiful wealth. To what avail is a dam in the face of such a calamity that would sweep Egypt off the face of the earth?"

Another question was the compensation the government would have to arrange for the Nubians whose land would be immersed under water stored behind the dam. From *Al-Ahram* we learn that while work was in progress on the dam, a committee was formed to deliberate how the Nubian population would be compensated. The committee decided to divide them into two categories, the first of which involved people whose land would be flooded during construction, but after which the water would recede and they would be able to cultivate it again. The second category consisted of those whose land would remain flooded throughout the year. The government would compensate those in the first category for their homes and palm trees they lost. The second category would be compensated for their land, homes and palm trees. When the Nubians protested the total compensation the government would pay — 80,000 pounds — the government "was determined to counter their obstinacy by promulgating a supreme edict appropriating their land in the interests of the public welfare." *Al-Ahram* counselled against such a harsh measure: "It would make the government appear as the powerful aggressor against the defenceless weak and it would be accused of tyranny even if it did have some justification for its action."

Al-Ahram's warning fell on deaf ears. On 1 July 1902 the edict was promulgated decreeing "the expropriation of the land of the Berbers which will be flooded by the waters of the reservoir." The edict would affect "the lands located in the vicinity of Dahut, Dahmit, Abouakab, Kalabsha, Abi Hur and 13 villages in the directorate of Aswan."

inauguration of the dam.

The first step in the process of construction was to draw up the terms for contracting the licence which the Egyptian government had given to Sir John Aird, the famous British contractor. The contract, signed in April 1898 by Fakhri Pasha, minister of public works, on behalf of the Egyptian government, stipulated the Egyptian government would pay to Sir John Aird and company LE2 million for the construction of the Aswan Dam and the Assiut barages. Payment would be made in instalments over a 30-year period, the first instalment of which would be due on 1 July 1903.

As *Al-Ahram* reported, the dam "would store the stipulated quantity of water, while the barages in Assiut would function to raise the water level so as to feed the Ibrahimiya Canal and the Yusufi Canal. The barages would be modelled on Quarter Al-Khayriya (the barages north of Cairo) and contain 111 sluice-gates, each of which would be five metres in width."

It transpired that the contractor discovered, while excavating for the foundations of the dam, that the ground was not solid enough, forcing him to dig six metres deeper than was originally planned. He therefore asked that his fee be increased by LE 1,240,000, which the government paid.

So frequently did Sir John Aird's name crop up those days that *Al-Ahram* dispatched one of its reporters to interview him. The reporter found him to be "an old man of considerable bulk with a thick white beard hanging down to his chest. He and his staff lived in modest conditions, displaying none of the grandeur and opulence of the oriental rich, even though he was an associate of some of the wealthiest financial magnates and a cohort of kings and princes."

Along with thousands of Egyptian labourers employed in the construction project, the company also engaged a number of foreign workers because of their particular expertise. As several news items indicate, these foreigners caused their employers quite a few headaches. On 25 March, 1899, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent from Aswan reports, "The Italian labourers engaged in the construction of the dam have declared a strike until the construction company that has been given the concession to build the dam agrees to meet their demands, the most important of which are shorter work hours." On 31 July of that year, the newspaper announced, "Thirty Italian workers who have been engaged in the Aswan Dam construction project have arrived in Cairo today. Unable to bear the heat and the difficult living conditions, they have decided to pack their bags and return to their home country."

What a manner of days, it reports again, "Within a matter of days, it reports again, that 40 Austrian workers returned to their country. 'One group of these workers was expelled for poor conduct while others were forced to leave for reasons of ill health.'

In spite of these setbacks, work proceeded on the dam until its completion within the space of five years. The British press lauded the speedy construction, drawing a comparison with the barages north of Cairo which took 15 years to build and required 12,000 infantrymen, 3,000 seamen and 2,000 conscripted labourers.

Even as work on the dam progressed, the Anglo-French rivalries persisted, with *Al-Ahram* siding, as usual, with the French.

When the French found that their objections failed to obstruct the work in progress, *Al-Ahram* reminded its readers that it was originally the French who conceived of the project. "However, the British, with their designs on Egypt, impeded this momentous project in the days when the French advocated it." Indeed, this was the theme the French seized upon, as though to spoil Great Britain's jubilation on the occasion of the inauguration of the dam. Prompted by the French government, the company which had submitted designs for the dam in the 1870s sued the Egyptian government for compensation for the expense it had incurred at that time. Evidently, it won its case and was granted compensation in the form of 52,000 faddans of reclaimed land in the vicinity of the dam.

On Wednesday morning, 10 December 1902, the train carrying the khedive and international consuls and representatives arrived at the dam for the opening ceremonies. *Al-Ahram's* correspondent wrote: "The khedive was hailed by an artillery salvo after which he proceeded toward the podium in the company of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, the ministers, His Eminence the Mufti of Egypt and His Eminence the Coptic Patriarch. The khedive and the minister of works delivered speeches very appropriate to this momentous occasion, after which the Duchess of Connaught was requested to lay the final stone on the structure almost four and a half years after the duke had laid the cornerstone." The correspondent goes on to describe how the duchess took a silver spade, applied some cement and set the final stone securely in place. The khedive then walked over to an electric device and switched it on, releasing a torrent of water from seven of the sluice gates.

Al-Ahram said: "This wondrous marvel which has materialised at great cost stands as a monument in science, wisdom, technical prowess and expertise." Nor would it be the last such occasion. It would have its counterpart in the High Dam some 60 years later, but under totally different circumstances.

The author is a professor of history and head of *Al-Ahram* History Studies Centre.



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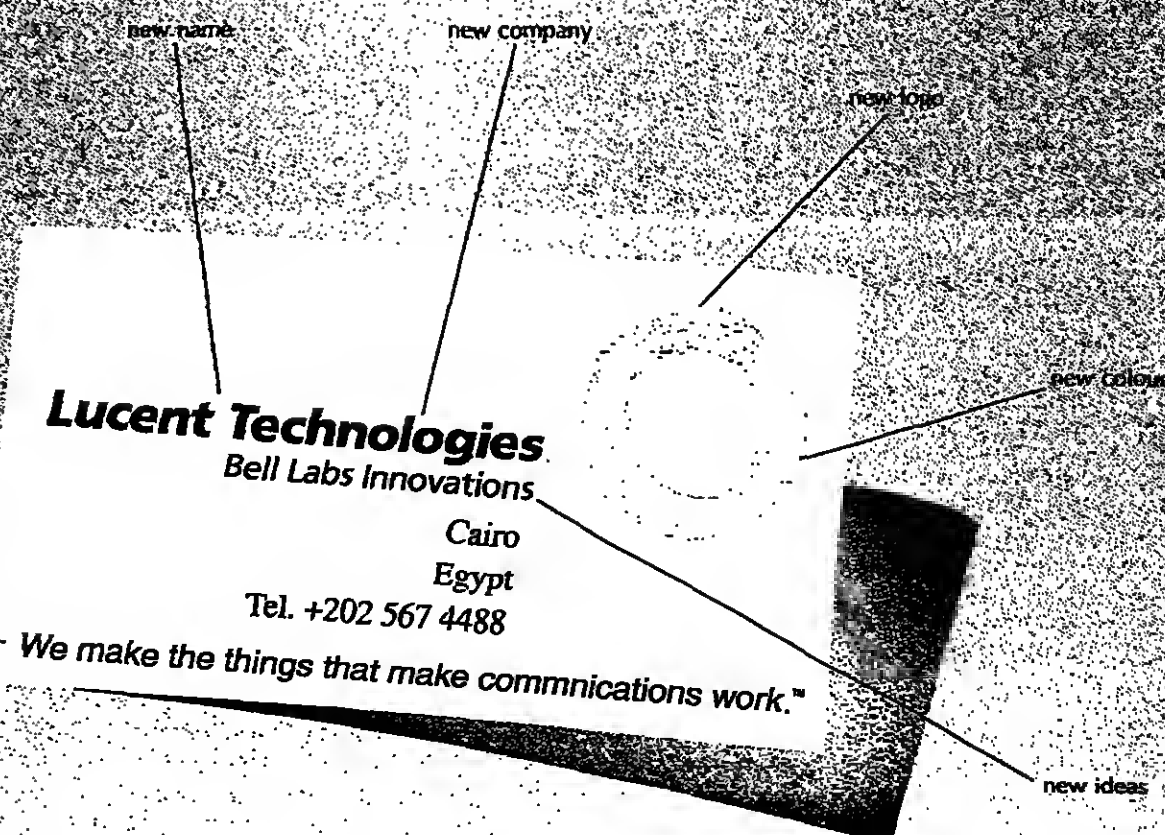
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